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A

# PILGRIMAGE TO LA SALETTE;

OR,

*A Critical Examination of all the Facts*

CONNECTED WITH THE ALLEGED

## APPARITION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

TO TWO CHILDREN ON THE MOUNTAIN OF LA SALETTE,  
ON SEPTEMBER 19, 1846.

BY

J. SPENCER NORTHCOTE, M.A.

LATE SCHOLAR OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD.

*Permissu Superiorum.*

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## PREFACE.

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THE following pages are printed in their present form in consequence of the unexpected degree of publicity which has been given to the subject of which they treat.

The circumstances of the case are briefly these: about two months ago, the author and one of his friends, Mr. Francis Ward, Solicitor, of Bristol, were arranging to take a short holiday; some members of the author's family had occasion about the same time to travel across France, and were in want of an escort; the author had long had a desire to visit the mountain of La Salette, Sanctuaries of our Blessed Lady being a subject to which his attention had been for some time especially called, and on which he had both read and written much;\* it was determined therefore that a visit to La Salette should be the end and object of their journey, which was so timed that they should spend the anniversary of the apparition upon the mountain itself. On their return, numerous friends were naturally anxious to learn the result of their inquiries; and to prevent the tedious repetition of the same tale, the author was invited to give a lecture upon the subject in the Catholic schoolroom of the town. This lecture was intended solely for Catholics, and notice of it was given at a time and place where none but Catholics were present, with an intimation that the sum received at the doors would be devoted to a local Catholic charity. By what means knowledge of the intended lecture came to the ears of the newspaper reporters, the author has not heard; but when

\* See Articles on "Celebrated Sanctuaries of the Madonna" in the *Rambler*, Nos. xxxiii. xxxiv. xxxv., 1850; xxxvii. xxxix. xli., 1851.



their presence in the lecture-room was mentioned to him, he did not feel that this was any reason for disappointing those Catholics who were already assembled. The lecture, therefore, was given, and reports of it, for the most part incorrect and imperfect, appeared in the local papers. It was not until one of these maimed reports found its way into the *Times*, that the author felt called upon to depart from his original plan of publishing the narrative only in two consecutive numbers of the *Rambler*. Under these new circumstances, however, of unlooked-for notoriety, he deemed it due both to himself and to his subject that no time should be lost in laying before the public a full and correct report of the whole history.

Nothing more than this has been here attempted. The author has confined himself to a faithful narration of the facts that have occurred, and a candid exposition of the arguments which may be deduced from those facts; and he believes that he has thereby done all that is necessary to convince unprejudiced minds of the reality of the apparition. He is well aware that to the great majority of Englishmen, the fact that an alleged event is of a supernatural character, is at once conclusive evidence against its existence; "we are sure," they say, "that all such narratives are necessarily false, because we are satisfied on *à priori* grounds that they could not possibly be true." For persons who argue thus, it is enough to say that the author has not written. To those only who are in a condition to listen to evidence, and to form a really fair and independent judgment upon the facts that will be laid before them, the following pages are addressed, and to them they are submitted with confidence.

J. S. N.

CLIFTON,  
*Festival of All Saints, 1852.*

## PILGRIMAGE TO LA SALETTE.

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AN English pilgrimage in the nineteenth century sounds strangely out of tune, like a false note in music, or a wrong accent in poetry. The time and the country suggest ideas of plain practical common sense, of busy active life, not to say painful haste and bustle; whilst the occupation to the minds of most men savours rather of dreamy enthusiasm, of unreasoning credulity, and of laborious but unprofitable idleness. At present, however, we are not concerned to justify pilgrims in general, nor ourselves in particular, from charges of this kind. We frankly confess that we have "sped a pilgrimage," and we propose in these pages to give some account of it. Only let not our Catholic readers straightway picture to themselves an image of weary and footsore travellers, with staff in hand and wallet on the shoulder, with beards untrimmed and clothes begrimed with dust, and all those other tokens of toil and discomfort which the pen of the romance-writer and the pencil of the artist have so intimately connected with our idea of the religious traveller. We must at once acknowledge that we have no claims to appropriate this mediæval costume; we saw a few such persons in the course of our travels, but it was not in a mirror; we were pilgrims of a more degenerate race, who did not refuse the kindly aid of railroads and steamboats and any other means of conveyance that was most convenient, and whose portmanteaus, if critically examined, would have brought to light, we fear, clothes-brush and razor, and divers other instruments of domestic comfort and cleanliness unknown to the pilgrim of former days.

A story is told of St. Philip Neri in Rome, that as he was one day walking with some of his companions on his favourite pilgrimage to the seven churches of that city, he met a young nobleman of his acquaintance making the same round in his carriage. The coachman stopped, and the young gentleman lost no time in communicating to the saint the pious work in which he was engaged. St. Philip, however, took little or no notice of his friend; but going up to the horses, he gently raised their feet one after the other, and having solemnly imprinted a kiss upon each of them in succession, took his leave, exclaiming, "*Beati cavalli, che fanno questo santo pelerinaggio!*" (Happy horses, to be making this holy pilgrimage!) We are not sure that we are not exposing ourselves to a similar rebuke, by giving to our travels the name of a pilgrimage, when we have taken care to divest them of all the manifold hardships usually supposed to attach to such a journey. However, *habetis confitentem reum*, and we plead therefore for a mitigation of punishment. Moreover, this open confession of our degeneracy has one great advantage for our readers; it absolves us from the obligation of laying before them any detailed account of our journeyings: for we had no "vexation and trouble by outrageous long living on the sea," no "dangers and perils by long contrarious winds and exceeding great storms," no "great weariness because of the beasts that we rode upon, that were right weak and right simple, and evil trimmed to journey with;"\* in a word, we had no adventures whatever, nothing worthy even of a passing note. We may therefore rush at once *in medias res*. We will imagine ourselves to have been suddenly transported to the south of France, to the city of Grenoble; or still further, we will imagine ourselves to have left Grenoble by the *Porte de la Graille*, to have traversed the plain of the *Drac*, and of one of its tributary streams, the *Romanche*, as far as the little busy town of *Vizille*; we will have surmounted the very long and steep, but beautiful ascent which leads from that town to *Lafrey*; passed the small lakes on the top of the hill, as also the town of *La Mure*; then threaded the curious corkscrew descent which leads us again into the valley of the *Drac*; ascended once more on the other side, passed through *Souchons*, and finally reached the little town of *Corps*, on the borders of the department of the *Hautes Alpes*. This is a distance of about forty miles from Grenoble; and we had already overtaken at different stages of the road a few straggling pilgrims, evidently bound for the same destination as ourselves, but

\* See the *Pylgrimage of Sir Richard Guylforde to the Holy Land*, A.D. 1506. Printed for the Camden Society, 1851.

travelling in a more pilgrim-like fashion. Here it was an old woman of sixty or seventy years of age, slowly creeping up the hill and leaning for support on another, less infirm but scarcely less aged than herself; there it was an old man, kept firm and steady on his donkey by the stout arm of his faithful son; or again, it was a younger and stronger group, five or six members of the same family or of the same village, trudging briskly along the road, or resting for a while under the shade of some friendly tree, and partaking together of the frugal fare with which they had provided themselves before leaving home. As we drew nearer to Corps, these scenes became more frequent; and when we arrived in the town itself, the tokens of the approaching *fête* were yet more manifest. Empty diligences and rude *chars à banc*, and other vehicles of the country, shewed us that we were not the only pilgrims who had been indebted to other legs than their own for having brought them thus far on their way. Here, however, all carriages must be dismissed, and there remained an ascent of six or seven miles which could only be made on horseback or on foot. We preferred the latter, and set forth at once, hoping to reach the summit of the mountain before sunset. The way was long and steep and rugged, and grew worse and worse as we advanced farther on our route; but the numerous bands of pilgrims seemed used to it, or were animated by a degree of faith and hope which caused them to think little of the difficulties of the road. They moved on slowly but perseveringly, with their baskets of provisions on their backs, and sometimes an offering of candles for the church in their hands; some were telling their beads in silence, others reciting the litany alternately with their friends; others, again, beguiling the time by lively conversation, the subject of which seemed usually to be either some circumstance of the original apparition at La Salette, or some miraculous cure they had seen or heard of, or some favour which they hoped themselves to receive as the reward of their present pilgrimage.

At last we reached the little platform on the top of the hill; but the shades of evening had already almost deepened into the darkness of night, and it was no longer easy to distinguish one object from another. The cross that had served as a beacon to us whilst yet we were at a distance to denote the particular height which we were to ascend, could still be recognised standing out boldly against the sky on the top of the hill on our left; whilst the open doors, and bright lights, and kneeling worshippers almost immediately before us, sufficiently indicated which of the humble tenements that we saw scattered around was used as the temporary church. A large



mass of unfinished buildings, also on our left, was clearly the new church and presbytery in course of erection; and a few dim lights scattered here and there on different sides of the platform pointed out the rude dwelling-places of the masons and others employed upon the work. Numerous groups, principally of women, were sitting or standing about, some enjoying the luxury of rest after the fatigue of the journey, others anxiously awaiting the arrival of the weaker members of their party who had not yet accomplished the ascent. From some of these we learnt which hut was occupied by the clergy, and thither we directed our steps. A letter from his Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster soon brought us an invitation into the parlour of this humble abode, and secured us a hearty welcome there. The room was wholly filled by a table and ten or twelve chairs, from which as many priests were just then rising and defiling off through another door into the open air, in order to admit ourselves and a number of ecclesiastics who had been detained with us in the kitchen. In fact, it was the hour of collation,—it was an Ember-day, September 18th, and the vigil of the feast of the Dolours of our Blessed Lady, the anniversary of the Apparition—and the clergy were obliged to succeed one another in this way, in order that all might have an opportunity of partaking of refreshment in turn. Those who had hitherto been engaged in the confessional were now called in, and others went to take their places; arrangements were made as to the hours at which each priest should say his Mass on the following morning, what devotions should be used during the night for the benefit of the pilgrims, &c. &c. As soon as this was settled and supper ended (during which we had enjoyed the opportunity of conversing with the Abbé Rousselot, vicar general of the diocese, professor of moral theology in the seminary, and historian of this sanctuary), the Père Supérieur of the missionaries went to the door of the church and made a corresponding announcement to the people; at the same time he gave them a very beautiful instruction as to the manner in which they could most profitably spend the intermediate time in their own private devotions. Our space will not allow us to give an abstract of this discourse; we need only mention that he proposed as a subject of meditation our Lord's Nativity, than which, our readers will at once perceive, it would have been impossible to have selected one more beautiful and appropriate. The darkness of the night, the assemblage of people gathered together from so many distant places without any sufficient shelter, the fact that our Blessed Lady had actually appeared there, and that her Divine Son was even now dwelling in the

tabernacle of that rudely-constructed temple—a few wooden planks covered with thatch,—are points of resemblance sufficiently obvious, and of which the preacher did not fail to avail himself. After listening to this short exhortation, the pilgrims went their several ways, according as their devotion prompted them. Some remained kneeling in the church or at the door, preparing themselves and awaiting their turn to approach the tribunal of penance; others went down to the fountain to fetch some of the celebrated water and to say their prayers, and make the meditation there that had been recommended them. A rough heap of stones marks the place where our Blessed Lady first appeared, and an image placed on the top, with a candle burning before it, now served to guide the pilgrims to this favoured spot. Some came and bathed their head, or their eyes, or their ears, or any other part of their body which was affected by any malady, in the stream that gushed forth from beneath this simple oratory, as though it were a new pool of Bethesda; others, again, only drank of the water and carried some of it away with them: but the succession of pilgrims at this place was continual; and very many of them, as soon as they had satisfied their devotion at the fountain, retired to some little distance up the mountain-side, and there knelt down on the green sod to pour forth their fervent prayers for the special object of their pilgrimage. Others were silently kneeling at the several stations of the cross, which have been set up to mark the path that our Blessed Lady trod before she finally disappeared. Others, again,—and these perhaps formed the larger portion of the assemblage,—were gathered together in groups, sitting on the ground or on the stones that lay scattered about, to be used in the new church, and singing French *cantiques*. In particular, this formed the perpetual occupation of a large body of pilgrims who were collected under a shed that seemed to have been prepared for the use of the workmen; and this singing, though somewhat wearisome to those who could not join in it, or who had hoped to steal a moment's repose any where in the neighbourhood, sounded both joyous and devotional when heard from the more distant parts of the mount.

At ten o'clock the ringing of a great bell was the signal for a general reunion of the pilgrims at the fountain we have spoken of. Flambeaux had been previously lighted and attached to the plain wooden crosses which marked the *Via Crucis*; and Père Sibillat, one of the priests permanently attached to this new sanctuary, now came out from the church, vested in stole and surplice, and accompanied by several other priests; and the whole assembly, under his guidance, proceeded to celebrate

the devotions of the stations. We need hardly say that this form of devotion, eminently beautiful and impressive as it is at all times, was rendered doubly so by the circumstances of the present occasion. It was the vigil of the feast of the Dolours of our Blessed Lady; it was precisely here that she had appeared in the very guise of a true *Mater Dolorosa*, with the crucifix and some of the instruments of the Passion hung about her neck; she had shed tears on this very spot, and published warnings and threats against the obstinacy of her perverse children. Surely such a place was calculated both to inspire the preacher with more than ordinary fervour, and to give his words a more than ordinary effect upon the minds of his hearers. Père Sibillat preached for a few minutes at each station, and recited the usual prayers; and then the five hundred pilgrims—for we believe that this was about their number, and that of these scarcely less than four-fifths were of the *devoti femineæ sexûs*—moved on to the next station, singing first that verse of the *Stabat Mater*,

“ Sancta Mater, istud agas,  
Crucifixa fuge plagas  
Cordi meo valide,”

and then a verse of a French hymn, specially appropriate to the station we had just left. It is difficult to keep an accurate account of the flight of time in a night of this kind; but the devotion of the stations certainly lasted more than an hour, and at midnight Masses began to be said. The little chapel is so small, that it was necessary to lay down rules for the admission of the pilgrims, and to adhere to them very strictly. The doors of the chapel were open; or rather there seemed to be no doors at all, but the whole interior was exposed to public view in such a way that a large number of persons could stand in the open air at a considerable distance, and still see the altar and the priest who was celebrating at it. Only a few at a time, however, could enter under the roof, and these were not allowed to be crowded by others pressing in from behind: they heard Mass quietly, and went to holy Communion if they desired it, a priest standing to prevent the entrance of any from without; but as soon as Mass was over, they had to go out through the sacristy, and were not allowed to return into the church again. Their places were immediately taken by others, and in this way there was a perpetual succession of persons approaching the altar without any hurry or confusion. At four o'clock there was a suspension of this continual celebration of Masses; for by this time all the pilgrims already on the mount had had an opportunity of fulfilling their obligation, and it was necessary that some priests should be kept in reserve, ready to



offer the holy Sacrifice for those pilgrims who should arrive at a later hour. The necessity for this precaution was soon sufficiently apparent; for from a very early hour of the day—soon after sunrise, in fact,—troops of villagers began to arrive from the neighbouring hamlets, anxious to celebrate the anniversary of the apparition on the very spot where it had taken place.

It was now Sunday; and the number of men, therefore, being no longer detained by their labour, began to assume more considerable proportions when compared with that of the women than it had done on the previous evening. Men, women, and children might be seen approaching on all sides: some from the villages of La Salette and Corps were slowly creeping up the very hill on which the sanctuary is situated; others were coming down from the opposite height, having climbed up from the more distant valley of Valfouffrey; and a third intermediate path, which seemed the most frequented of all, wound round the side of Mont Gargas, coming up from the village of St. Michel. As these three paths poured forth their numerous travellers on the narrow table-land of des Bais-ses, the crowd rapidly increased, the busy hum of voices grew louder and louder; and it was difficult to believe that one was standing, *not* in the suburbs of some populous metropolis, *not* on the greensward of some favourite village retreat in the immediate neighbourhood of a much-frequented thoroughfare, but on the bare summit of an uninhabited mountain five or six thousand feet above the level of the sea. By nine o'clock the numbers assembled must have exceeded three thousand, and the tinkling of a little bell announced the approach of others in a regular parochial procession. They came along the path of St. Michel that has been already spoken of, so that they were visible for a considerable time before they actually reached us. The cross was borne first; then came the priest in surplice and stole; then the men; and lastly the women, with long white veils which not only covered their heads, but also so enveloped their whole figures that it was scarcely possible to distinguish the colour of their dress; and all carried open books in their hands, and were busily engaged in chanting the praises of her whose sanctuary they were come to visit. At the same time the bell of the temporary chapel was rung, and the priest, deacon, and sub-deacon, followed by a large number of clergy, went down by the stations of the cross, and proceeded a little way up the side of the opposite hill, to celebrate high Mass at an altar that had just been erected there above the celebrated fountain. In the middle of high Mass there was a very eloquent sermon, and at the end of it Benediction of the most holy Sacrament. Altogether



it was a wondrous sight, the celebration of these holy rites on the mountain of La Salette; it was a spectacle that requires the pencil of the artist to do it justice, and that will only be spoilt by any efforts of our feeble pen to describe it. The clergy in their white and shining vestments moving to and fro upon the green grass about the altar; the smoke of incense rising up from behind them to the broad canopy of heaven; the bright blue blouses of the men, and the large straw hats and scarlet umbrellas of the women—happily on this occasion needed only as a protection against the sun—thousands of pilgrims kneeling up and down the sides of the hills, upon the grass or upon the rocks and stones; old men and children, matrons and maidens, “the old with the younger,” all joining in one universal prayer and hymns of praise and thanksgiving; whilst horses, mules, and asses, and here and there a few goats and cows, might be seen peacefully grazing in the background. Oh, it was indeed a strange and striking spectacle, and one that forced upon the minds of those pilgrims who were present from a foreign and unbelieving land this plain and obvious question: What is the origin of this spectacle? How comes it that the most sacred rites of our holy religion are being celebrated under such unusual circumstances? What is the cause of this vast concourse of people gathered together from all parts, some at the cost of extreme bodily pain and real difficulty, and all with more or less of fatigue and inconvenience? What does it all mean? How did it all begin?

These questions, we say, were irresistibly forced upon our minds, as we think they would naturally be forced upon the minds of all persons who witnessed the scene, or who now hear or read of it. The *Times*\* newspaper, that great organ of public opinion in this country, alternately its master and its slave, had solved these questions only a few days before we left England in its own peculiar style, “with that luminousness, keenness, and certainty” so especially its characteristics; and doubtless the explanation which it gave was entirely satisfactory both to the writer and to his numerous readers. It may be summed up in these words: “a monstrous imposture” and “a notorious falsehood” on the part of the priests, “the grossest credulity and the most grovelling superstition” on the part of the people. This is at least a compendious mode of writing history, and extremely convenient wherever it is not desirable that people should be left to form their own conclusions from an honest and detailed account of all the facts and circumstances of the case. In these pages we propose to deal with the question in a some-

\* See *Times* of Tuesday, September 7th.

what less summary manner; we intend to lay before our readers a complete history of the Pilgrimage of La Salette,—its first beginnings, its gradual progress, and its final establishment; and if in the course of this narrative we are obliged to repeat much with which some of our readers are already familiar, we hope that they will kindly bear with the repetition for the sake of those to whom the whole history may be new, as also for the completeness of the subject, which is in truth of the highest interest and importance. For we have here what we can scarcely hope to find elsewhere, a perfect and continuous history of a place of pilgrimage; there are no old traditions whose origin is lost in the darkness of antiquity; no ravages of fire and sword have destroyed the records of any intermediate period; but the whole history lies open before us from beginning to end, all contained within the narrow compass of five or six years. The thing has grown up in our own times, we might almost say under our own eyes; even the newspapers of the day, both English and foreign, have given publicity to the main outlines of the history from the very first, so that we have an opportunity of studying this rare phenomenon, the creation of a new sanctuary or place of pilgrimage, with the most minute exactness. And certainly it is a phenomenon well worth attending to, for Protestant controversialists would have us believe that it is a matter which can be summed up in half a dozen words. Some idle tale of a dream, or vision, or miraculous cure, is first invented by a designing priest, or imagined by some weak-brained enthusiast; then the ignorant and superstitious people instantly believe it; the bishops and clergy move heaven and earth to encourage their credulity; and behold, the whole thing is done. Born in obscurity and nurtured by priestcraft, the tale is forced into a sickly maturity, and begets a sanctuary and a pilgrimage, only by means of the most jealous vigilance and fostering care of its clerical guardians, who tenderly shelter it from every breath of opposition until the time for inquiry is past; and if in future ages some diligent antiquarian, about to write the history of the Church, should seek to investigate the first origin of the narrative so intimately connected with its foundation, he will find no written documents that can assist him in his researches, but only the uncertain voice of tradition, and he must be contented to say with the old historian of Rome, "*Datur hæc venia antiquitati, ut, miscendo humana divinis, primordia (ecclesiarum) augustiora faciat.*" Such is the popular Protestant idea on matters of this kind; and although we are not so sanguine as to suppose that the present history can have much effect in silencing these malignant

falsehoods, yet we trust it may be of use to some at least of the more candid of our adversaries (as well as to many Catholics also, to whom such subjects have not been familiar,) to see what has been the actual conduct, in the most recent and celebrated instance, of the bishop and clergy concerned: whether, as a matter of fact, they have really manifested that excess of zeal, that unreasoning credulity, and that determination to stifle inquiry, which popular prejudice is in the habit of attributing to them; or whether, on the contrary, their conduct has been characterised by a gravity, deliberation, and prudence worthy of the subject on which they were engaged.

Six years ago the name of La Salette was unknown, save only to the inhabitants of its immediate vicinity. It is a small village, consisting of eight or ten hamlets scattered about, at no great distance from one another, in different nooks and corners among the roots of the French Alps, which rise rapidly, and in some places almost precipitously, behind them. The chief of these hamlets, where the church is situated, and which gives its name to the whole parish, is not less than 3700 feet above the level of the sea. The population, about 800 souls, are poor and simple, principally small farmers, with their families and dependents. Late on the evening of Saturday, the 19th of September, 1846, two children, servants of two of these farmers, returned from the mountain where they had been engaged all day in keeping cows, and told their masters a very wonderful story. The eldest of the children was a girl of fifteen years of age, who had been out at service ever since she was nine or ten years old, and had been with her present master for the last six months. We have seen and conversed with this girl, and shall have occasion to speak more particularly of her by and by. The other child was a boy of eleven, who was quite a stranger in the village, having been brought from the town of Corps, a distance of three or four miles, only on the previous Monday, as a temporary substitute for a cowherd that was ill. These two children, then, told the following tale:—They said that about midday they had driven their cows, according to their usual practice, to a certain rivulet to drink; that they had at the same time consumed the store of provisions which had been given them when they left home in the morning, and that after wandering about a little, they lay down on the grass and fell asleep near a fountain which was at that time dry; that the girl, Françoise-Mélanie Mathieu, was the first to awake, and seeing that the cows had strayed, she immediately awoke her companion, Pierre-Maximin Giraud; that they went together to look for



their cattle, and from the brow of the hill almost immediately discovered where they were; but before going to reclaim them and drive them to their proper pastures, they turned back to the place where they had slept to fetch their empty provision-bags; that their eyes were at once arrested by the appearance of a very extraordinary brilliance, dazzling as the sun, yet not of the same colour; and that this was presently succeeded by the more distinct vision of a lady radiant with light, sitting on the stones at the head of this dry fountain, in an attitude of the most profound grief. She was clothed in a white robe studded with pearls, and a gold-coloured apron; white shoes, and roses of every variety of colour about her feet; a wreath of roses around her head-dress, which was high and a little bent in front; upon her breast was a crucifix, suspended by a small chain from her neck; on the left of the crucifix was a hammer, and on the right the pincers; another and larger chain encircled all these instruments of the Passion, and this again was within a still larger wreath of roses. When she stood upright, she was of a tall and majestic appearance,—*so* tall, Mélanie assured us, that she had never seen any one of equal height; the children, however, were unable to gaze steadfastly upon her countenance because of its brightness. At present her elbows rested on her knees, and her face was buried in her hands, whilst tears flowed copiously from her eyes. The girl was frightened, and dropped her stick; but the boy bade her pick it up again, adding that he should take care of his, for that if *it* (meaning the figure which they saw) offered to do them any harm, he would give it a good blow. The lady then rose, crossed her arms, and in a gentle voice bade the children not be afraid, but to come forward, for that she had great news to tell them. The children obeyed the summons, and the lady advanced to meet them. Presently she stood between them, and addressed the following words to them, weeping as she spoke: “If my people will not submit themselves, I must let the hand of my Son fall upon them; it is so strong, so heavy, that I can keep it up no longer. How long a time have I suffered for you! If I wish my Son not to abandon you, I am obliged to pray to Him without ceasing; and yet you pay no regard to all this. However much you may pray, whatever you may do, yet you never can recompense all the trouble ~~that~~ I have taken in your behalf. I have given you six days to labour in, I have reserved the seventh for myself; yet they will not give it me. It is this which makes the hand of my Son so heavy. Wagoners cannot swear without introducing the name of my Son. These two things are what make the hand of my Son so heavy. If the harvest is spoilt, you

yourselves are the only cause of it. I made you feel this last year in the potatoes, but you took no account of it; on the contrary, when you found the potatoes were spoiled, you swore, and you took the name of my Son in vain. They will go on as they have begun, and by Christmas there will be none left."

Thus far the lady had spoken in French, and the girl had not understood what she was speaking of in this last sentence, because in the *patois* of that country potatoes are not called *pommes de terre*, but *truffes*. Mélanie, therefore, was going to ask Maximin what was the meaning of this word, *pommes de terre*; but she had not yet spoken, and the lady knowing her thoughts, anticipated her words by saying, "Ah, my children, you do not understand me, I will speak differently;" and she then went on to repeat the very same sentence—beginning with the words, "If the harvest is spoilt,—" using the *patois* of the neighbourhood. This she also continued to use in the following: "If you have corn, you must not sow it; all that you sow the beasts will eat; any that comes up will fall to powder when you thresh it. There will come a great famine; and before the famine the children under the age of seven years will be seized with a trembling, and will fall in the hands of those that hold them; the rest will do penance by the famine. The nuts will become bad, the grapes will rot; but if they be converted, the stones and the rocks will change into heaps of corn, and the potatoes shall be self-sown in the earth."

Here the lady paused, and it seemed to Mélanie that she was speaking to the boy, but she heard nothing of what was said; then, in like manner, she spoke to Mélanie, and the boy saw that she was speaking, or seeming to speak, but could not hear what was said, or whether any thing was really being said at all. Only afterwards, when the vision had disappeared, the children spoke to one another about this mysterious silence, and each declared to the other that the lady had at this juncture confided to them a secret, which they were on no account to reveal to any one until the time came for so doing. Neither knew any thing about the secret of the other, whether it was the same as his own or different.

The lady then resumed her discourse to the two children together, asking, in the *patois* of the country, "Do you say your prayers well, my children?" "Not very well, ma'am." The lady replied, "Take care always to say your prayers, my children, every night and morning. When you can do nothing else, say only a *Pater* and an *Ave Maria*; but when you have time, say more. Only a few old women go to Mass, the others work on Sundays during the summer; and

in the winter, when they know not what to do, the youths go to Mass only to make a mockery of religion. In Lent they go to the shambles like dogs. Did you ever see corn that was spoiled, my child?" Maximin answered, "No, ma'am." Mélanie too gave the same answer, but in a gentle tone, for she was not sure whether or not the question had been addressed to her as well as to her companion. The lady then spoke to Maximin, and said, "*You* have seen it, my child, once when you were with your father at Coire. The owner of a piece of ground there told your father to go and see his wheat that was spoilt. You went, both of you, and you took two or three ears of corn in your hands; you rubbed them, and they crumbled into dust. Then you went home; and whilst you were about half an hour's walk from Corps, your father gave you a piece of bread, and said, 'Take this, my child, let us eat it this year whilst we can get it; I don't know who will be able to eat any next year, if the wheat goes on like that.'" Maximin answered, "Oh, yes, ma'am, I remember now; just now I had forgotten all about it."

Then the lady spoke once more in French, and said, "Well, my children, you will cause this to be told to all my people;" and with these words, she passed on before the children and crossed the rivulet, and ascended the short but steep side of the opposite slope; then she turned back again and repeated the very same words; and again she walked forward to the spot where the children had gone when they were in quest of the cattle. She did not touch the ground as she walked, but moved along on the tops of the grass; the boy and girl followed in her track. Then the girl moved forward a little in advance, and the boy walked on one side of the lady; and presently the lady seemed to rise in the air about three or four feet from the ground, after which the children lost sight of her head, then of her arms and body, and lastly of her feet, and there was nothing left but a great brilliance; by and by even this too was gone; and Mélanie and Maximin began to speculate as to who this stranger could have been. Hearing her speak of the weight of her Son's arm, they had at first imagined that it was some woman who had been ill-treated by her son; but now Mélanie said that she thought it must be some great saint, and Maximin said, that if he had known this, he would have asked her to take them along with her; and both wished that they could bring her back again. Maximin stretched out his hand to catch some of the bright light and of the roses which had seemed to surround her feet, but he found he had grasped nothing. Still they gazed and gazed, hoping they might see something more, but nothing returned; whereupon they came



to the conclusion that the lady had made herself invisible on purpose that they might not see whither she went. So they gave up the search and went to look after their cows. There were other boys and girls on different parts of the mountain engaged in the same occupation as themselves; but the children had not exactly understood who *mon peuple* were of whom the lady had spoken, and to whom she had desired them to communicate what she had said; so they thought it their duty to hold their tongues, and they told nobody what they had seen until they got down into the village, when they immediately told it to their respective masters. They came first to the house of Mélanie's master, and both went in together and told it to him; then the boy alone went on to the farm to which he belonged, and as soon as his master came home, he communicated to him the same story.

Our narrative of the apparition has insensibly glided from the *oratio obliqua* into the *oratio recta*. We have been recording as historical facts what we should have recorded as the mere statement, whether true or false, that was made by the two children on their return from the mountain. We must, however, beg our readers to believe that this has only been an inaccuracy of style, and not of thought. We are far from taking it for granted, that their conviction would, as a matter of course, go along with our language, in thus assuming the truth of the history; indeed, such an expectation would have been in the highest degree unreasonable, for there is required something more than the mere assertion of two children to beget a belief in a supernatural vision or any other kind of miracle. For brevity's sake we have told the tale just as it was told by Maximin and Mélanie, and in their own words.

The strange news soon spread among the neighbours, but it was not believed. Early the next morning, the master of the boy, who had promised to take him back to Corps on that day, brought both the children to the parish-priest. He was a very simple-hearted old man; and after having listened to the tale, and questioned and cross-questioned the narrators, he was so impressed with their truthfulness, that he repeated a good deal of the history to his parishioners in the middle of that day's Mass; an irregular and rash act, for which, as we shall presently see, he was afterwards reprimanded. He was so much affected in reciting the story, that those who had heard nothing of it before scarcely knew what he was speaking about. However, as soon as Mass was ended, they lost no time in informing themselves, and all crowded round the children to hear it from their own lips. Our readers may easily imagine the cross-examination to which they were sub-

jected. Still nobody could succeed in shaking their testimony; they steadily persisted in repeating the same thing over and over again to all inquirers, answered all their questions with a readiness and simplicity truly surprising, and disposed of all their objections with the ease and ingenuity of the most practised advocates; in a word, though their evidence stood alone and unsupported, yet it was impossible to throw discredit upon it by any contradictions or inconsistencies in their manner of giving it. The girl was now sent by her master to drive the cows to the mountain as usual. It was a long and tedious ascent, and not one of the neighbours had the curiosity to accompany her; they did not yet believe the story they had heard; the pilgrimage to La Salette had not begun. After vespers (our readers will not have forgotten that it was Sunday), eight or ten people went up, and these were the first pilgrims, led rather by curiosity than by faith; and they made Mélanie tell her story again, and point out the precise spots where every thing was said to have happened. On her return in the evening, the mayor of the village came and questioned her; he questioned the boy also in a separate apartment; he then brought them face to face, and gravely told them that what they had been saying was clearly a lie, and that God would punish them very severely if they persisted in repeating it. He exhorted them, therefore, to confess the imposture, and promised to shield them from all punishment. His eloquence was entirely thrown away; the children said they must do as "the lady" had told them and proclaim the fact. Next he offered them money, about 2*l.*, to bribe them into silence; it was in vain; and lastly he threatened them with imprisonment and other punishments; but this too was equally inefficacious, and the worthy magistrate returned to his home baffled and perplexed, and perhaps half disposed to be convinced. At a later hour of the day, the boy was taken back to his parents at Corps according to agreement; and this was of course a means of spreading the marvellous story throughout a wider circle; or rather, there became two centres, as it were, from whence it radiated throughout the neighbouring towns and villages, the boy at Corps and the girl at La Salette. Of those who heard the story, some shook their heads and laughed, and whispered something about priestcraft, ignorance, and superstition; but others, on the contrary, turned it over in their minds, and thought it would be well to go and examine the witnesses for themselves, to confront them with one another and with the scene of the supposed vision. Of those who adopted this latter course, many returned quite satisfied and convinced; and all acknowledged that they certainly were



unable to detect the fraud and imposture, if fraud and imposture there were. There was nothing, perhaps, either in hearing the story again from the lips of its original narrators, or in seeing the places where it was alleged to have happened, that was calculated in itself to enforce conviction upon an unwilling mind; only the most incredulous were obliged to confess, that if the story was really false, it was strange they could not succeed in detecting the falsehood in any of the multiplied examinations, conducted with more than judicial severity, to which these young and ignorant children had been subjected. Daily experience shews us how the most plausible tale is often made to break down, or at least to *seem* to break down, under the pressure of some skilful cross-examination; but in this instance there was nothing of the kind; the witnesses could not be brow-beaten; the story kept its ground. And this was a great step. A consistent story, however strange, if it be continually repeated and insisted upon, gradually gains belief; it perplexes and annoys those who would fain disbelieve it, but it slowly gains the assent of the indifferent and unprejudiced. And it was so here. Persons, priding themselves upon their prudence perhaps, again and again made offers to the children of large sums of money if only they would hold their tongues and say no more about it; but their answer was uniformly the same, viz. that they had been specially charged by "the lady" to cause it to be told to all the people, and that they must obey this command. Still, it must not be thought that they went about in an excited gossiping way, neglecting their daily duties, and taking upon themselves the office of itinerant preachers; far from it: they remained steadily in their former humble occupations, the girl continuing in the same service at La Salette, and the boy living at Corps with his parents; only they always repeated the history to those who asked for it, and answered the objections of those who tried to gainsay their testimony, and pointed out the precise spot where it all happened to those who sought their company for that purpose.

We must not omit to mention another circumstance also which tended greatly to give credibility to the children's words, viz. that an intermittent fountain at the spot where this "lady" first appeared, and which on that day and for some time previously had undoubtedly been dry, was found to be flowing copiously on the following morning, and had never since ceased; nor has it ceased up to the present day, though previously to the apparition it flowed only at rare intervals, after a heavy fall of rain or the melting of snow upon the mountains.

So much, then, for the original story of the children, and


their steadfastness in maintaining it. Now comes the question, How was this story received by the authorities of the Church? Did they encourage or discountenance it? or did they observe a strict neutrality?

Many of the parish priests in the neighbourhood wrote to consult the Bishop (of Grenoble) as to what they ought to do and say under the circumstances; and these inquiries soon became so general, that on the 9th of October, that is, within three weeks after the story had first been heard of, his Lordship addressed the following circular to his clergy:

Monsieur le Curé,—You have no doubt heard of the extraordinary facts which are said to have taken place in the parish of La Salette, near Corps. I beg you will refer to the Synodical Statutes which I gave to my diocese in the year 1829. You will find there at page 94: "We prohibit, under pain of excommunication to be incurred *ipso facto*, the declaration, printing, or publication of any new miracle, under any pretext of notoriety whatsoever, excepting only the authority of the Holy See or of our own, after a severe and careful examination." Whereas, therefore, we have not yet pronounced upon the facts above referred to, both duty and prudence prescribe to you the greatest possible reserve concerning them, and above all an absolute silence about them in the pulpit.

Notwithstanding this, certain persons have ventured to issue a lithograph print of the scene, to which are appended some verses. I have to announce to you, Monsieur le Curé, that this publication has not only not received any approbation from me, but that it has much annoyed me, and that I have formally and severely reproved it. You will be cautious, therefore, and both set an example of prudent reserve in your own conduct and also recommend the same to others.

Accept, Monsieur le Curé, the assurance of my sincere and tender regard.

By order,  PHILIBERT, *Bishop of Grenoble.*  
CHAMARD, *Honorary Canon, Sec.*

But whilst the Bishop was thus enforcing a wise caution on his clergy, he was far from being an unconcerned spectator of what was going on. He had already removed the parish priest of La Salette to another cure, and substituted a priest brought from a distance; he now required all the clergy of the neighbourhood and of his own episcopal city, and all others whom he knew to be travelling in that direction, to institute the most careful inquiries upon the spot, and to communicate the result to him without delay. He studied with great diligence the mass of documents which were thus forwarded to him; and in consequence of what he learned in this way, he appointed two commissions early in December to draw up a report for him, and to advise him whether or not he should pronounce any decision on what was said to have happened. One of these



commissions consisted of the chapter of his cathedral, the other of the professors in the ecclesiastical college of the diocese. On the 15th of December these reports were presented, and they were perfectly unanimous in the advice which they gave; advice characterised by that extreme caution and prudence which are so uniformly found in ecclesiastical decisions on matters of this kind, but the very reverse of which Protestants, in their ignorance, habitually attribute to them. Both the canons and the professors advised his lordship to abstain from giving any decision whatever: he could not, they said, give an unfavourable decision, for the whole affair was *très plausible*, and such as they should certainly be disposed to believe at once if it were only an ordinary and natural event that was being called in question; and moreover, it had produced none but purely beneficial effects; it had excited the devotion of the people, and made them more exact in the performance of their religious duties; it had entirely removed in the neighbourhood where it had happened the faults complained of,—the swearing, the desecration of the Sunday, &c. &c. The Bishop could not, therefore, declare the story to be false, and prohibit all belief in it. On the other hand, it rested on the authority of two children, who might *possibly* be either deceiving or deceived; and the personage who was supposed to have appeared to them had not required them to communicate it to the ecclesiastical authorities; there was no *obligation*, therefore, on the part of the Bishop to give any judgment at all; and considering that all eyes were upon him, and what a serious thing it was to pronounce in such a matter, they counselled a complete silence, “to leave those who were satisfied with the sufficiency of the proofs that could be alleged, free to believe it, yet not to censure those who, from a contrary motive, refused or withheld their belief. If this event comes from God, and it is God’s will that the authorities should interfere in the matter, He will manifest His will more clearly and positively. Then it will be quite time enough for the authorities to break silence; there is no necessity to do so at present; there is no danger in delaying; it is more prudent, therefore, to wait.” Such was the language of the Bishop’s advisers, and it is language which will commend itself to every sober right-judging man. There is something in it, if we mistake not, eminently practical, which the English mind is singularly calculated to appreciate; and we will venture to say that it is as far as possible from what any of our Protestant readers would have expected.

Matters remained in this state for a considerable time; that is to say, there was no official interference on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities, either in the way of encourage-

ment or otherwise, for a period of six or seven months. But meanwhile the story spread far and wide, and found many to credit it; priests, and even bishops, came from a distance, examined for themselves, returned home, and sometimes published an account of their visit, uniformly pronouncing themselves in favour of the reality of the apparition. Rumours of miraculous cures wrought at the fountain, or elsewhere, upon persons drinking of the water of the fountain and calling upon the intercession of our Lady of La Salette, grew and multiplied. Pilgrims from various parts of France and Italy, and even from Spain and from Germany, began to arrive in large numbers. The affair was growing serious; it arrested the attention of the government, at that time by no means inclined to look favourably upon any thing that savoured of religious devotion and enthusiasm. People, it was said, ought not to be allowed to flock together in this way in an obscure corner of the kingdom. What was this secret? these prophecies of famine and distress coming upon the land? There might be some political mystery at the bottom of it; it might be intended to take advantage of the superstition of the people to devise some plot, or to create some disturbance of the peace; any how it was a matter that should be looked into, and, if necessary, be put down. Accordingly, on the 22d of May, 1847, the children were summoned by order of the higher authorities, before the *juge de paix*, or justice of the peace, for Corps, assisted by the recorder or registrar of the same district. They were examined both separately and together; and after a solemn warning from the magistrates to declare the whole truth and nothing but the truth, they each repeated, almost word for word, the narrative which has been already given. In forwarding the depositions to the attorney-general, which was done on the following day, the examining magistrate enclosed a private note, saying that the children had given their evidence very much as if they were reciting a lesson; but he added, "this is not to be wondered at; for they have repeated it so often, and to such a number of persons, that they have naturally acquired this habit." He further added, that he could vouch for the identity of their present narrative with that which they gave at the very first to their masters; at least he had been assured of this identity by the testimony of one of the masters themselves; if there was *any* difference at all, it was strictly verbal.

Two months later, July 19th, the Bishop of Grenoble again appointed a commission, with authority to institute the most rigid examination, and to collect all possible information upon the subject, both as regarded the history of the event



itself, and also the authenticity of any miracles which professed to have been wrought in connexion with it. This commission consisted of sixteen ecclesiastics of the highest repute in the diocese for learning and piety; the two vicars-general, eight canons, the superior of the seminary, and five parish priests. Two or three of these set out about ten days afterwards on a tour of inquiry, which they prosecuted with great diligence throughout the neighbouring dioceses of Valence, Viviers, Avignon, Nîmes, Montpellier, Marseilles, Fréjus, Digne, and Gap. On the 25th of August they arrived at Corps and examined the children; and the next day they ascended the mountain in their company, and in the company of some thirty or forty other persons, ecclesiastics and others. Having thus done all that it was possible to do in the way of preliminary investigation, having collected a good deal of very important documentary evidence properly attested, the members of the episcopal commission were summoned for their first formal session on the 8th of November. The Bishop himself presided on the occasion; the proceedings were opened with a solemn invocation of the Holy Ghost, and other prayers; a form of devotion was prescribed for the daily use of all the commissioners during the progress of the inquiry; a plan of operations was laid down according to which the inquiry should be conducted; and this was the whole of the first day's business. We hope this minute specification of details will not seem tedious to any of our readers; but in truth, as we have already insinuated, the whole value of what we are writing depends entirely upon its minuteness. It would be easy to say, and doubtless it would also be very *true* to say, in a multitude of other cases where shrines have been built and pilgrimages instituted in honour of our Blessed Lady, that nothing of all this was done without diligent inquiry and examination on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities in the first place; but we are anxious, by means of an actual and recent example, to enable our readers, both Catholic and Protestant, to see for themselves what sort of thing an episcopal investigation really is: to shew them that it is no hurried superficial affair, the work of an hour or a day, a few questions carelessly proposed and indifferently answered; but a *bonâ fide* sifting and searching inquiry, conducted with all the formalities of a strictly legal process, and that therefore any conclusion they may come to is entitled to very great weight. To resume, then: at the end of their first session the commission adjourned to that day week, and on the 15th of November they met again to examine witnesses; first, the curé of Corps, then the boy Maximin. The next day they examined the girl, and also the

Reverend Mother Superiress of a religious community, in whose schools both the children had been taught (reading and writing, and their religion, for they had been grossly ignorant) ever since the Christmas after the apparition; and on the third day they examined both the children together. On all these occasions the ingenuity of the examiners was racked to the very utmost to discover questions that should perplex and expose the children; there were those upon the bench who by no means wished the weight of episcopal sanction to be given to the marvellous narrative which the children told, and who therefore suggested doubts and difficulties, and proposed questions which they themselves thought quite unanswerable. But their labour was all in vain; and at the end of the third day they had made no progress whatever towards invalidating the testimony of these dull, uneducated peasants. The acuteness of some of their answers (specimens shall be given hereafter), the simplicity of others, and the unhesitating boldness of all, proved to be more than a match for all the captious objections and subtle refinements of the most practised logicians. The fifth conference was held on the 22d of November, and the subject discussed was the nature of probability and of moral certainty, the number of witnesses necessary to authenticate a fact, &c. &c.; and at the end of this session a certain portion of the report was read and adopted. The next two sessions, of the 29th of November and the 6th of December, were devoted to the examination of documents sent from other dioceses relative to certain miracles alleged to have been wrought upon persons drinking the water of the fountain of La Salette, and joining in certain devotional exercises addressed to our Blessed Lady under this new title. In the first of these sessions, two miracles were admitted as proved according to the strictest rules laid down by theologians in this matter; and in the second, one only was admitted. The eighth and last session was held on the 13th of December; in it divers objections and difficulties were started and solved, the remainder of the report was adopted, and the Bishop declared the conferences to be now closed; he thanked the members of the commission for their assiduous attendance, and dismissed them, saying that he reserved to himself the right of pronouncing his solemn judgment upon the matter that had been under discussion, at such time as he should deem most suitable.

Such is the history of the committee of inquiry, as we may call it, that was instituted by the Bishop of Grenoble to investigate the extraordinary story circulated by the two children; and we think most unprejudiced persons will have no difficulty in subscribing to our own opinion, that for sober,

straightforward, and business-like order of proceeding it will not suffer by comparison with any of our ecclesiastical courts, any committee of our House of Commons, or in fact any other of the much-vaunted judicial or semi-judicial tribunals of our country. The report was ordered to be printed, together with the *pièces justificatives*, as they are called,—that is, the documents on which certain portions of it were grounded; and the work would have appeared immediately, but for the revolution which broke out so unexpectedly on the 24th of February, 1848. It was scarcely to be expected that amid the general excitement and confusion which was the consequence of that event, amid the distress and misery which were the necessary results of so sudden an overthrow of public credit and paralysis of all the usual branches of commerce and industry, the report of an ecclesiastical committee should arrest the public attention. In the middle of June, however, the Bishop ordered it to be published, and, in the letter of approbation which he caused to be prefixed to it, he declared his conviction that it would be found to be useful to persons of all classes; for “it will tend to dissipate,” he says, “many erroneous opinions that have gained possession of the public mind. Those who believe the story, those who doubt, and those who disbelieve it, will all read the work with interest, and, we hope, not without profit. Pious persons who have believed it will see that by so doing they have not incurred the reproach of imprudence and weak-mindedness. Those who have thought it safer to suspend their judgment will certainly be struck by the many and strong arguments by which the fact is supported. And lastly, those whose prejudices are such that they at once declare to be false whatever is uncommon and marvellous, will yet remember that truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, and that an event whose fame has filled the whole Catholic world for the last twenty months, and has set in motion more than a hundred thousand pilgrims, does not deserve to be rejected without any examination.” The extreme moderation of this language of the venerable Bishop must strike even the most prejudiced reader with astonishment, if not with admiration. The story of the two children had now stood the test of public criticism for nearly two years; they had been examined and re-examined during this period both by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, as also by hundreds upon hundreds of private individuals, both lay and clerical, both well-disposed and ill-disposed towards the reception of their tale, and yet they had never been detected in a contradiction or an inconsistency;\* they had been subjected to every kind of treatment

\* The single exception, if it be one, to this remark will be noticed elsewhere.



that the most determined resolution and the most experienced ingenuity could devise, to force or to wheedle them into a betrayal of their alleged secret, yet not the faintest whisper had escaped them which could furnish even so much as a clue to its probable nature and subject; they had become objects of interest to hundreds of thousands, and their society had been sought by some of the best and wisest of the land, yet they had not profited by these circumstances to enrich their families, neither did it seem to have in any way injured their natural humility and modesty of character; pilgrims had come from the north and the south, from the east and from the west, and had carried off with them of the waters of La Salette as a precious treasure, and then there were borne back to the infant sanctuary from the four winds of heaven rumours upon rumours, or rather proofs upon proofs, and well-authenticated proofs, of miraculous cures and other supernatural favours, both temporal and spiritual, obtained through the medium of this new apparition; men of prudence and of learning had come from afar to inquire and to satisfy themselves by a rigorous examination upon the spot, and had gone away saying, "It cannot be but that the finger of God is here;"\* in a word, the seal of truth had been as it were visibly set upon the whole narrative both by the voice of God and of man, yet the Bishop does but allow and encourage the publication of the report; he abstains from issuing any authoritative decision, and chooses rather to leave all the subjects of his diocese free to canvass the facts, and, if they will, to deny and to ridicule them. Certainly one would have thought that the prudence and moderation of this judgment had scarcely deserved to be branded with the note of "gross credulity and grovelling superstition."

But to proceed with our narrative. The report was received with the greatest eagerness on all sides; several thousands of copies were sold in a few months, for it was the first official and really authentic document that had appeared upon the subject, and all knew that it could be depended upon. The concourse of pilgrims continued to increase, and was only suspended during the winter months, when the snow and ice rendered the mountain inaccessible. Several bishops wrote to the author of the report, or to the Bishop, to express the satisfaction with which they had read it, and their own intimate conviction of the truth of the children's story; and the general opinion of the public expressed itself more and more strongly in the same sense. In the end of December 1849, the Bishop authorised the publication of a supplement

\* See the letter of Mgr. Dupanloup, written on the 11th of June, 1848, and published in the *Ami de la Religion*, 7 Avril, 1849.



to the official report, consisting chiefly of facts and documents connected with the authentication of new miracles that had been wrought in various dioceses of France upon persons using the water of La Salette, and invoking our Lady's help. In publishing these documents, the Bishop expressed his conviction that they would go far towards removing any doubts and prejudices that might yet remain in the minds of any against the truth of the apparition; that they would cause the indifferent to reflect, and confirm the faithful in their devotion. Still he pronounced no judgment; he did not attempt to interfere with the belief of others.

One feature in the case yet remained which might seem to afford a convenient shelter for doubt and suspicion. "Nothing can be easier," it was objected, "than for the children to say that they have been entrusted with a very precious secret; but as long as they steadily refuse to communicate to any man living what that secret is, we are at liberty to doubt whether they really have any secret at all; we have no proof of it, and therefore we shall disbelieve it." When our readers come to learn by and by the strength of the temptations by which the children were tried upon this head, and consider the facility (on the supposition that the children are impostors, which, of course, is what these objectors professed to believe) of *inventing* a secret, they will estimate this argument at its true value. However, the pastoral solicitude of the Bishop of Grenoble was not satisfied until he had removed even this stumbling-block from the way of the weakest members of his flock. Accordingly, early in the month of July last year, the aged prelate sent for the two children, and explained to them that all visions and revelations and supernatural events of whatever kind that happen in the Church ought to be fully and completely submitted to the holy Pontiff; that as head of the Church and Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth, it belonged to him to judge in these matters; he therefore required them, under obedience to his authority, to commit to writing the secret which they said our Blessed Lady had confided to them, and he on his part would charge himself with the responsibility of sending the letters by faithful messengers to Rome. As soon as the children were satisfied by the Bishop's arguments that it was their duty to obey him in this matter, they sat down at different tables, and wrote their respective letters without the smallest hesitation, and exactly as if they had been copying what they wrote from some original before them. They signed and sealed their letters, and the Bishop entrusted them to the vicar-general of his diocese and another priest to carry to Rome. On the 18th of the same

month these precious missives were placed in the hands of the Holy Father by the persons we have named. His Holiness immediately read them in the presence of the messengers, but, of course, without communicating to them any of their contents: he said he must read them again at his leisure, and then added, "These are scourges for France, but Germany and Italy, and many other countries, deserve the same;" and he went on to assure the Abbé Rousselot that his books (the report and its supplement, already mentioned) had been examined by the Promoter of the Faith, and were approved of. Thus fell to the ground the last reasonable excuse for doubt. The secret which these two poor ignorant children had professed to be entrusted with, and which for five years they had so jealously and so successfully guarded against the pertinacious efforts of thousands of curious inquirers, was no fiction, but a reality; a reality sufficient to engage and to satisfy the mind of the holy Pontiff, and therefore more than sufficient to assure all reasonable men that at least it was no idle invention of the children themselves.

At length, therefore, on the 19th of September, 1851, the fifth anniversary of the apparition, after so many years of careful and patient investigation, the Bishop issued a formal authoritative decision, and in a pastoral letter, the whole of which, if our space allowed us, we would gladly transfer to our columns,\* solemnly declared the apparition to be a certain and unquestionable fact. He begins this letter by explaining and justifying his long delay, which arose, he says, from no indifference or slowness of heart to believe, but simply from that prudence and circumspection which is so necessary a part of the episcopal character. He knew, on the one hand, that any hasty decision in such a matter would scandalise both weak Catholics and avowed unbelievers; and on the other, that no real harm could arise from a cautious delay, "since the religion of Jesus Christ has no need of this particular fact to establish the truth of a thousand other heavenly apparitions in times past, recorded in Holy Scripture." Although personally, therefore, his own conviction of the truth of the children's narrative was complete at the end of the examination that was conducted in his presence in the months of November and December 1847, still he had been unwilling to press it upon the acceptance of others who might think differently about it. Since that time he had redoubled his prayers to the Holy Spirit that his mind might be illumi-

\* As much as we can find room for shall be printed in an Appendix. The original may be seen in the *Manuel du Pèlerin à Notre-Dame de la Salette*, par M. l'Abbé Rousselot, page 29. Grenoble; Baratier, 1852.

nated, and that he might be guided aright; he had scrupulously studied and followed all the rules laid down by holy doctors of the Church as necessary to be observed in affairs of this kind, and was ready to submit and correct his judgment, if the See of Peter, the mother and mistress of all churches, should declare herself in a contrary sense. "Wherefore," he continues, "considering, in the first place, that we are wholly unable to explain the fact of La Salette in any other way than as an act of the direct interference of Almighty God, whether we look at it in itself, in its circumstances, or in its object, which is essentially religious; considering, in the second place, that the marvellous consequences which have flowed from this fact are the testimony of God Himself, given by means of miracles, and that this testimony is superior alike to the testimony and to the objections of mere men; considering that either of these reasons taken alone, and still more both together, ought to override all doubt and utterly destroy any weight which might at first sight seem to attach to the difficulties and objections which have been raised against it; considering, lastly, that a spirit of docility and submissiveness to the warnings of Heaven may preserve us, perhaps, from those new chastisements with which we are threatened, whilst contrariwise a prolonged resistance may expose us to fresh and irremediable evils: At the express demand of all the members of our venerable chapter, and of a very large majority of the priests of our diocese, as also to satisfy the just desires of a large number of pious souls, both at home and abroad, who would otherwise, perhaps, accuse us of hiding and imprisoning the truth, Having called upon the Holy Spirit and implored the assistance of the pure and spotless Virgin, We decree as follows:" namely, what has been already mentioned,—that the apparition of La Salette is a true and certain fact, which none of the clergy or faithful of the diocese are hereafter at liberty publicly to contradict or call in question; that it may be preached and commented upon in the pulpit, but that no prayers or hymns, or other books of devotion connected with it, may be printed without the episcopal approbation, given in writing; and that a church and house of refuge for pilgrims shall be immediately begun on the site of the apparition, for which purpose alms are solicited from all the faithful.

This pastoral was followed by another on the 1st of May in the present year, a few extracts from which will serve better than any words of our own as a commentary upon the last. After speaking of the high privilege he had enjoyed in being the chosen instrument to proclaim the truth of an apparition



of the Blessed Virgin, a privilege and a duty of which he was *obliged* to avail himself under pain of a blameworthy resistance to the voice of God and to the unanimous desire of the faithful, the Bishop continues: "Our *mandement* of the 19th September has been received with universal satisfaction; for, in truth, public opinion had anticipated our decision, and the formal decree which we issued did but give that sanction which was wanting to make it a full and complete certainty. We have received numerous congratulations, expressions of agreement with our decision, gifts, and promises of assistance from divers princes of the Church and a large number of our venerable colleagues. . . . It could not be otherwise, my brethren; for it was not without a purpose that the Mother of Mercy condescended to visit the children of men. . . . Words descended from on high must needs spread far and wide, and be heard by all nations. Look back at the origin of this great event; see its obscure birth, its rapid diffusion first throughout France and the whole of Europe, then to the four quarters of the world, and, finally, its arrival in the capital of Christendom. To God alone be the honour and glory! We have only been a feeble instrument of His adorable will. It is to the august Virgin of La Salette that this prodigious and most unexpected result must be attributed; she alone has made the necessary disposition of things to bring it about—she alone has triumphed over all obstacles, solved all objections, annihilated all difficulties—she alone has prepared all that has yet happened—she alone will put the final crown upon her own work."

He then goes on to announce the arrangements he has made for laying the foundation-stone and blessing the new church, as also for establishing a body of clergy to be called Missionaries of our Lady of La Salette, who shall reside on the mountain during that part of the year when it can be frequented by pilgrims, and during the winter months shall be employed in preaching missions and retreats in different parts of the diocese.

The ceremony of laying the foundation-stone had been fixed for the 25th of this same month, the month of Mary, and the Bishop had requested one of his colleagues, the Bishop of Valence, to take his place on the occasion; for being very old, and having suffered for many years from neuralgia in the face, he hesitated to expose himself to the fatigue of so long and toilsome a journey. As the day drew near, however, he could not deny himself the satisfaction of visiting a spot which had become so dear to him; and on the morning of the 24th he set out from Grenoble, slept that night at the little village of La Salette, and at six o'clock the next morning mounted

his horse and began the steep ascent. It was an affair of two hours, but the sight which awaited him on the summit abundantly rewarded him for the fatigue he had undergone. The platform was covered with pilgrims of all ranks and ages and countries, most of whom had spent the night there in the same way as we ourselves witnessed it a few months afterwards. Before daybreak 3000 had approached the altar to partake of the bread of life, and there was still a continuous succession of persons similarly employed. The Bishop said Mass about half-past eight, and soon afterwards the Bishop of Valence arrived, followed by a long train of pilgrims eager to assist at the solemn function. Unfortunately a fine, piercing rain began to fall about this time, and continued perseveringly throughout the rest of the morning; it was not allowed, however, to interrupt the order of the ceremonies. The prelates laid the stone together; then the Abbé Sibillat preached to an audience of 15,000 pilgrims, after which the Bishop of Valence said Mass, and gave Benediction with the most holy Sacrament to the assembled multitudes.

Thus the pilgrimage of La Salette, whose first feeble beginnings may be said to date almost from the very day after the original announcement of the apparition, but which had grown so rapidly that not less than 60,000 pilgrims were assembled on occasion of the first anniversary, was now finally and authoritatively established. Henceforth it takes its place among the most famous and acknowledged of our Lady's sanctuaries; and though it is not probable that such immense numbers will ever again be gathered together there at one time (unless it be, perhaps, the consecration of the church, or some other special occasion which cannot now be foreseen), yet we may predict with confidence, that as long as the world shall last it will never cease to be an object of interest and a place of frequent pilgrimage to the pious servants of Mary. There are many other such places in various parts of the world already, some of them venerable with the traditions of fifteen or sixteen centuries upon them, others of more recent date. But it is scarcely possible that there should be any whose claims upon our respect and devotion can be more thoroughly and satisfactorily sifted than that whose history has now been given. We have traced its early beginnings and marked every stage in its progress, from the episcopal letter of the 9th of October 1846, enjoining upon the clergy "an absolute silence" upon this matter in the pulpit, down to the second letter from the same Bishop, dated the 19th September 1851, in which he not only allows the whole story to be preached and published, but also peremptorily forbids any of the clergy to con-

tradict it; and we need not hesitate to assert that the history which we have given proves at least as much as this, viz. that there was no carelessness or precipitancy on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities concerned, but, on the contrary, the utmost deliberation and prudence; and that no attempt was made to stifle inquiry and opposition until the experience of five years had demonstrated the futility of all objections that could be raised. One very important question still remains to be considered, viz. whether the evidence to which his lordship and the committee of his appointment ultimately yielded is such as would command the assent of all reasonable men; or whether they allowed themselves too easily to be persuaded by the plausible tale of the children and the credulity of those around them. In other words, we have to inquire what grounds there are for believing in the reality of the alleged apparition. Was the story that was told by the two children truth, or was it fiction?

The subject naturally divides itself into two branches, the external and the internal evidence of the truth of their story; and of these the internal is by far the most interesting and important. The article in the *Times* newspaper, to which reference has been already made, says plainly, "There is *no* evidence of this astounding fact (the whole history of the apparition) except that of the two children;" and though this cannot be accepted as a really true and honest account of the state of the case, yet we should have little objection to join issue upon it as though it were, in arguing with any candid and reasonable opponent. It is to an examination of the children and their story that we propose mainly to confine ourselves.

And first as to the story itself; it would be impossible to enumerate all the trivial and captious objections which have been taken to it from time to time, by persons more eager to exercise and display their ingenuity than to ascertain the truth. One writer objects to the dress attributed to "the lady" in the apparition; another, to the undignified character of some of the images whereby her sentiments were expressed, and to the use of any but the purest French, as though the communication of ideas did not absolutely require a similitude of thought and language. We will not try our readers' patience, nor waste our own time, by answering all these objections in detail; some of them are, on the very face of them, utterly futile and absurd; and others, which may seem at first sight more solid, are found on examination to become on that very account real arguments in favour of the truth of the nar-



rative. For instance, the colours in which artists almost universally represent the dress of our blessed Lady are white and blue; it is unlikely, then, that any one setting about to *invent* a story of her apparition, should do needless violence to this conventional costume, and commit the atrocious blunder (which was destined, it seems, to destroy the credit of his tale) of dressing her in white and yellow. Or again, it was an unworthy simile, say these modern critics, to speak of the people "going to the shambles in Lent *like dogs*;" just as unworthy, we suppose, as the same language in the mouth of holy David, when he said, "Many dogs have encompassed me; the council of the malignant hath besieged me;" and again, "Deliver my soul from the sword, my only one from the hand of the dog," and in many other places; or as the language of our Blessed Lord Himself, when speaking of Herod the king, He bade the Pharisees "go and tell *that fox*, Behold, I cast out devils."\* Or again, it is not to be tolerated that our Blessed Lady should have dared to personate, as it were, Almighty God Himself, and to repeat portions of the third commandment absolutely, in the first person singular, as though she herself had been the author of that commandment, in those words, "I have given you six days to labour in, I have reserved the seventh for *myself*;" and yet instances are not wanting in Holy Writ where other messengers of God, angels or prophets, have used the same forms of speech, repeating the words of God without any express acknowledgment that they were His, but rather in their own proper persons, as though proceeding simply and immediately from themselves; as, for instance, "the angel of the Lord" who called to Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, did not hesitate to say, "Lay not thy hand upon the boy, neither do thou any thing to him; now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for *my* sake." In like manner, we believe that it was an angel who delivered the law to Moses on Mount Sinai; yet he spoke in the name and person of God, saying, "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of Egypt;"† and yet once more, what is there in the language of Isaias to denote the sudden transition from speaking in his own name to speaking in the name of God, which we observe in the end of the 64th and beginning of the 65th chapters of his prophecy? Or again, it is objected that the wrath of God is first distinctly denounced for one sin only, the desecration of the Sunday,—"*It is this* which makes the hand of my Son so heavy;" that presently this is corrected,

\* Psalm xxi. 17, 21; St. Luke xiii. 32.

† Gen. xxii. 11, 12; Exod. xx. ii; Gal. iii. 19; Heb. ii. 2.

as it were, and another sin is mentioned, the taking of God's name in vain; and then it is said, "These *two things* are what make the hand of my Son so heavy;" and finally, before the close of the conversation, a third sin is named, the non-observance of days of fasting and abstinence: and yet this too is by no means an uncommon characteristic of the language of holy Scripture.\* On the whole, then, it may be truly said, concerning all these minor objections, that when we come to look closely into them, we find that they not only melt away and disappear as objections, but that they also leave behind them some positive presumption in favour of the history with which they are connected. At first sight they look strange and incongruous, so that no one wishing to invent an easy plausible tale, which should impose upon the public credulity, would have disfigured his narrative by such seeming improbabilities; yet, when more critically handled, they are found to be quite in harmony, or certainly not at all out of harmony, with what we know of other communications addressed from heaven to the children of men.

There remain two other objections of a more serious character, which it is necessary that we should consider with greater attention. One is an alleged inconsistency between the narrative of the boy and of the girl; the other concerns the many prophecies which were contained in "the lady's" discourse, and which, it is urged, have not been fulfilled. We will speak first of the prophecies. This certainly has a very grave appearance; for if a person professing himself to be a messenger from God deliberately makes predictions, the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of which must be a matter easily ascertainable, and it proves that, as a matter of fact, those predictions do not receive a fulfilment, it would seem to be a most obvious and necessary conclusion, that the pretensions of that messenger are false; and this is what some persons would fain persuade us concerning the prophecies of "the lady" at La Salette. But let us examine this statement more closely for ourselves. The first prophecy which we meet with in "the lady's" discourse concerns the blight upon the potatoes; it is declared that this shall continue as it had begun, and that by Christmas (in that year) there should be no potatoes left. About this portion of the prophecy there is no dispute; every one allows that this at least was sufficiently fulfilled. We do not mean to say that literally there was not a single potato left in that village or neighbourhood by the time specified; but there was a most extraordinary scarcity of them, and had they been used in the same quantities and with the same

\* See Proverbs xxx. 15, 18, 21, 29; Eccles. xxvi. 5, 25.



freedom as in other years, there would certainly have been none at all. But the prophecy went on to say, that there should be a failure of the grapes and of the nuts, a famine also, and a pestilence peculiarly fatal to children; and all this, it is said, has not been fulfilled. At least so it *was* said with an air of most triumphant confidence two years ago; already, however, it has become necessary to adopt a less boastful tone in speaking on this subject, for during the last two years there has been a most serious failure of the vintage. Any one who visits the south of France may read in the booksellers' windows of Lyons, Grenoble, or any other city in those parts, the titles of various new books which undertake to treat of *la Maladie inconnue de la vigne*, "the unknown disease of the vine;" unknown, that is, in its true nature and for any available remedy, and indeed unknown altogether, even in its outward symptoms, but two short years ago; yet not unknown, it appears, to "the lady" on La Salette, who foresaw and foretold it four years before it shewed itself by any sensible manifestation. How shall we account for this? The facts are undeniable; it is a matter of public notoriety that the prophecy of a failure of the vintage was a part of the story of La Salette, printed and published by episcopal authority four or five years ago; it is equally notorious that such a failure has actually come to pass in the last two years, and that the most lively apprehensions are felt as to its probable continuance in consequence of the similarity which scientific men fancy that they can detect between the symptoms of the disease which destroyed the potatoes and that which is now ravaging the vines. Even the daily papers tell us as much as this, and that this scourge too has fallen not only upon the south of France, but upon Tuscany, Madeira, and other parts of the world. As to the immediate neighbourhood of La Salette, we can ourselves vouch for the presence of the disease, for as we passed through the vineyards, we gathered the grapes; they were no larger than peas, and hard as bullets, and yet it was the middle of September; moreover they were covered with a fine white powder, which seems to be the usual token of the pernicious blight. At the same time we inquired also about the nuts, but of these there was quite the average crop; neither has there been any failure of the corn-harvest, nor any extraordinary mortality among the children. The prophecy of these then is unfulfilled; but is it, therefore, quite certain that it will always continue so? or does not rather the fulfilment of one part of the prophecy create a strong presumption that the fulfilment of the rest will not be slow to follow? But should the event prove otherwise, should ten, twenty, or thirty years

go by, and none of these things come to pass, would the falsity of the apparition of La Salette be thereby established? No Christian, believing the histories which he reads in the Bible, can dare to answer this question in the affirmative; for was not Jonas a prophet of God? and was not "the preaching which he preached" in Ninive, "the word of the Lord?" yet what was the issue? "Jonas cried and said: Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed;" the men of Ninive believed this word and repented; "and God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way, and God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said that He would do to them, and *He did it not.*"\* Observe, the prophecy of Jonas was *in its form* absolute and unconditional; not a hope of mercy was held out to the inhabitants in the actual words that were addressed to them; the announcement was most precise, and determined to a definite period: "yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed." But in the prophecy uttered by "the lady" at Salette, not only was there no fixed period within which it was certainly to be fulfilled, but the whole discourse was essentially conditional. It began with an expressed condition, and ended with the same; and it is obvious, therefore, that we are at liberty at least, if not positively obliged, to understand a condition as running throughout the whole. "*If* my people will not submit themselves," it was said, "I must let the hand of my Son fall upon them;" and again, "The nuts will become bad, the grapes will rot; *but if they be converted*, the stones and the rocks will change into heaps of corn, and the potatoes shall be self-sown in the earth." It is obvious, then, that a man can only be wilfully perverse, who refuses to give credit to the story of La Salette merely on the ground of its threats having been yet but very imperfectly fulfilled; some portion of them *has* been already fulfilled, a portion which no merely human sagacity could possibly have foreseen; and as for the rest, it may not be fulfilled perhaps for many years, or even never fulfilled at all, and yet the person who uttered it may have been a real messenger from heaven, and her words may have been "the word of the Lord:" for, in the first place, no period of time was fixed which has since elapsed, and within which the threatened punishments ought to have been inflicted; and secondly, even if there had been, yet the repentance and conversion of the people—a fact on which we shall have to insist more at length presently—may have moved God "to have mercy with regard to the evil which He had said that He would do to them, so that He did it not."

\* Jonas iii. 4, 10.

And now let us turn to the alleged inconsistency between the narratives of the two children. The writer in the *Times* has told us that they "differ from each other in many material particulars;" that the children "contradict each other's statements, and refuse to modify either the one or the other;" but then, according to that practice so familiar and so convenient to public journalists, and (we will add) so fatal to the cause of truth and morality, he entirely omits to furnish us with any proof of this assertion. Secure of the most ready and uninquiring acquiescence on the part of his readers, he is contented that so all-important a statement should be laid before them in the barest possible way, without any corroborative evidence whatever, but resting merely on his own *ipse dixit*. Under these circumstances we might fairly be excused, therefore, if we were to confine ourselves in like manner to a simple denial of his statements, and wait for the production of his proofs. We prefer, however, to deal more honestly with our readers, and will proceed at once to adduce all the evidence that we can find bearing on this very important point. First, then, we have the attestations of the two farmers in whose service the children were at the time of the apparition, and to whom the story was first told; these declare, not only that the children gave one and the same account of what they had seen and heard when they came down from the mountain, but also that they had steadily persevered in the same, spite of the most numerous and severe cross-examinations, down to the period at which these attestations were made, that is to say, for more than a twelvemonth. One of these farmers had committed the narrative to writing on the very day after he first heard it; and the Ms. is still extant, so that nothing could be easier than to detect additions or variations, "subsequent improvements by the priests,"\* if any have really been made. Next comes the evidence of the mayor of the village, who confesses that in the course of an hour's diligent examination on the day after the apparition, he had failed to detect any contradiction whatever. Thirdly, we have the testimony of M. l'Abbé Lagier, the parish priest of a distant village in the same diocese, who examined the children day after day for a whole fortnight, in the month of February 1847, and who wrote down the questions and answers with all the formality of a public notary; and in the whole of this voluminous document not a single contradiction can be found. Another ecclesiastical pilgrim, three months afterwards, kept an equally exact journal of a six days' examination of the children, conducted in the presence of numerous witnesses; and it is perfectly consistent

\* See *Times* of Tuesday, October 26. |



with itself, and perfectly uniform with that which had been made by his predecessor. About the same time M. Dumanoir, doctor in civil law, and acting judge at Montelimart on the Rhone, went to visit the spot; and after spending a long time in examining the children, he drew up an account of what he had heard more precise and accurate in its form than any which have yet been mentioned, but in substance altogether identical with them. It was in this same month of May that there was that official examination of the children by government officers which has been already described; and what report do these severe and impartial judges return of the examination? After having given at length the testimony of the girl, they go on to say of the boy, *Maximin répète textuellement le récit de Mélanie*; and they add: "The two children were examined separately. It was duly explained to each of them, that being in the presence of a court of justice, they were bound to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth; to which they replied that they had always done so, and then they told their story very much as if they were reciting a lesson; but this is not to be wondered at, for they have told it so often and to so many people, that they have naturally acquired the habit of reciting it in this way;" and, as we have had occasion to observe before, the private letter of the judge added still further, on the authority of the master of the boy, that there was no difference between the evidence that they had now given and that which they gave to him on the very evening of the alleged apparition. What more can be desired by any reasonable person to establish beyond all doubt the consistency of these children's narratives both with themselves and with one another?

But what traces, then, are there of the contradictions so confidently asserted by the *Times*? And what can be the authority for so reckless a misstatement? This is a question which it is not difficult to answer; and the answer will serve only to put in a still stronger light the real truth of their narrative. The children have been subjected, from the very day of the apparition, to the most minute and tedious cross-examinations at the hands of every body whose devotion or curiosity has prompted them to go and seek an interview with them for this purpose. There has been no attempt to shield them from the importunity, and sometimes even the impertinence, of these self-constituted judges; and in many instances their inquiries have been pushed to the most extravagant lengths: question upon question has been put of a most captious character, and upon the most trivial details, for the sole purpose of perplexing and confounding the witnesses; ques-

tions utterly without point, often even difficult to be understood, have been proposed from sheer wantonness, merely for the amusement of seeing how they would get out of them; and in some of these, the answers of the children have been at variance, or they have refused to give any answers at all. *Hinc illæ lacrymæ!* For instance, the boy could not tell of what colour were "the lady's" stockings, the girl said they were of the same colour as the apron; they were not of one mind, or they said they did not observe, whether of the two was the brightest, the colour of the apron or of the chain; and so on through some half-dozen other trifles of no greater significance than these. One, and one only discrepancy is there of a graver kind; three or four persons—the number is not greater—testify that in telling the story to them, the boy made an addition to "the lady's" discourse, which was not to be found in the girl's account, nor indeed in the account usually given by the boy himself; they say, that after speaking of the young men "going to Mass only to make a mockery of religion," he inserted these words, "the boys put stones and other things into their pockets to throw them at the girls;" that is to say, he is accused of having added to the original narrative a development, a practical example, as it were, of the fault which had been just complained of (inattention and misbehaviour in the house of God), by specifying a particular abuse which really was at that time very prevalent in the parish churches of Corps and the neighbourhood.\* Certainly this is a most noble foundation on which to build a charge of falsehood, contradiction, and inconsistency. Truly the credulity of the incredulous is most astonishing!

Rather than believe in the reality of an apparition and a miracle, they will believe that two ignorant and uneducated children can, in the course of one day—for they had not known one another longer—concoct together, or learn by heart from the lips of some third person, a long and marvellous story of something which they are to profess to have seen, and of a message which they are to profess to have received and to have been charged to communicate to the people; that they can repeat this story word for word without any variation for thousands of times during a period of five or six years; that they can undergo any amount of questioning and any severity of cross-examination, whether in the familiar conversations of a fireside circle, or the more deliberate scrutiny of half a dozen thoughtful and intelligent inquirers, or even the keen and searching interrogatories of the most experienced advocate,—and yet one of them be never detected in any inconsistency at all, and the other only

\* It has now utterly ceased.

in such an one as has been here described. Is this really credible? Is it even possible? Taken at the very worst, what does the variation amount to? That a boy of eleven years old should have allowed himself, on some half-dozen occasions out of as many thousands, to incorporate into the text which he was reciting an interpretation or application of that text, of which it was most obviously susceptible, and to which he was in the habit of hearing it applied by those about him every day. This is the very utmost that can be said; and was it necessary, then, in order to constitute these children fit and trustworthy bearers of a heavenly message, that they should receive the gift of infallibility or impeccability for ever? Unless this can be shewn, an occasional unwarranted addition by one of the children upon a mere accessory, even though it had been done wilfully and deliberately, will not, in the judgment of an unbiassed mind, invalidate the testimony of both as to the main fact.\* But, in truth, the matter is not so bad as we have represented it. It was natural that the people of the village, as they listened to the children's story, should make a sort of running commentary upon it, applying the general terms that were used in the discourse to the particular faults which they knew to be prevalent amongst them; and it appears that they used often to interrupt the children by comments of this kind, and to ask whether "the lady" had not said something about this, that, or the other sin, which seemed evidently alluded to, though not actually named. And the children sometimes found the easiest means to rid themselves of these importunate interruptions was to give a feigned assent and go on with their story. Thus one day, when Maximin was repeating the history to a number of girls and women, they wanted to know whether the lady hadn't said something about dancing and about making bad confessions. He replied in the negative; but when they reiterated the inquiry, and insisted upon it that she *must* have said it, he merely answered, *Comme vous voudrez*, and went his way. Nothing can be more natural than this; and it is obvious that in this way many a little circumstance might easily get mixed up in the minds of some persons with the main narrative, of which, in fact, it did not form any real part. It would not have surprised us, therefore, if there had been *many* reported contradictions of this kind; what *does* surprise us, and what disbelievers in the reality of the apparition are bound to account for is, that there should have been only one, and that

\* Those who wish to examine more deeply this question of the mixture of truth and error in cases of this kind, may consult Benedict XIV. de serv. Dei beatif. et canoniz., lib. iii. cc. 44, 47, 53.



one so unimportant. Let them adduce any other example of a false story, originated, or at least circulated, by persons equally ignorant, that has maintained its ground in the same purity for an equal length of time under an equal degree of publicity. Until this has been done, we can afford to smile at those who would make mountains out of molehills, and allege such trifles as these, as the motives and excuses of their unbelief.

And here we should have taken our leave of the objections that have been raised against the children's story, but that we observe the *Times* has again returned to the subject, and started a new difficulty; and it is so seldom that the world (whose faithful type and able representative we look upon the *Times* as being) condescends to take any notice of the *details* of narratives of this kind, that we would not on any account neglect to answer their objections, whenever they can be met with in a tangible form. The objection, then, in the present instance, when stated simply and without any of the profane and unbecoming language with which the writer in the *Times* has thought proper to embellish it, stands thus: It appears the Virgin Mary began her discourse in French. How could the children, who only understood their own *patois*, recognise any language but their own jargon for French or any thing else? Whence came the interpretation of the prefatory matter (that is, the portion that was spoken in French and not repeated in *patois*)? Why did the Virgin Mary mystify these wretched children by talking to them in a language they did not understand?—The difficulties, then, which are proposed are in fact twofold: First, how were the children enabled to recollect, and bring away with them, so as to report to others, words spoken in a language they did not understand; and secondly, how came our Blessed Lady to speak to them in such a language? With regard to this latter point, it is not too much to say, that we might fairly be excused if we were to pass it by altogether, since certainly it was not we who made the story, neither do we believe that it was ever made by any man. Rather it is for the writer in the *Times*, and such as him, who believe that this story is a work of fiction, to account for the author having introduced into it what they consider to be so clumsy and improbable a feature. For ourselves, we believe that we have only been recording a true account of something that really happened; and it is not essential to the discharge of our duty, as historians, that we should be able always to assign the true motives of the several deeds we narrate, even when the agents are mere living men and women like ourselves; still less, therefore, when the agent belongs to an-



other and higher order of beings, can it justly be made a subject of reproach against us, if we are unable to recognise a probable reason for every thing that the said agent is recorded to have done. We have only to narrate the facts; the reasons of those facts are not properly any concern of ours. However, although we do not presume to dogmatise upon the reasons which may have induced our Blessed Lady to begin her discourse in French and to continue it in *patois*, yet it is obvious to remark that one result of this fact, if fact it really were, was to furnish a very strong token of credibility to the children's narrative. For when they returned to their homes and repeated a long story, part of which was in good and correct French, those who heard them would naturally inquire, How can these children have learnt a language of which but yesterday they were ignorant? All thoughtful persons, we say, must necessarily have been struck by this circumstance; their attention would have been arrested by it, and if they could not discover that the children had been taught by any human means, they would seem to have had no alternative but to accept the whole marvellous tale of which this was at once a part and a proof. Although then we do not pretend to say what other good and wise purposes our Blessed Lady may have had in leaving that first part of her discourse engraven upon the children's memory in French and not in *patois*, yet it is undeniable that this is at least one beneficial purpose which she *might* have had, and which it actually *did* serve; and therefore it is a most abundant answer to the objection which we have undertaken to examine.

We cannot refrain from adding also, whilst upon this subject, a purpose which was effected (and which therefore may have been designed) by the remarkable return to the use of the French language in the concluding paragraph of the discourse. It is said that the whole conversation, after the first sentence, was carried on in *patois* until "the lady" said, last of all, and just before disappearing, "Cause all this to pass to my people:" and it comes out in the course of the history, that because the children did not fully understand who *mon peuple* were, they abstained from saying a word of what had happened until they saw their masters in the evening. Had it been otherwise, had they comprehended at once that it was the design of "the lady" who had conversed with them that they should publish the conversation to the whole world, they might have told it immediately to all the little children who were keeping cows upon the same mountain with themselves; and thus the story would have reached the village in the evening in a hundred distorted forms, each little prattler making

fresh omissions, or additions, or variations of his own, until, amid the general confusion, men might have refused to give credit to any version whatever of a narrative of which they had heard so many. But now, the lips of the two children being sealed as it were by this uncertainty as to who were meant by *mon peuple*, the story was first told to adults capable of appreciating and retaining it, one of whom indeed, as we have seen, lost no time in committing it to writing; and it was circulated only in its true and genuine form. We see then how a circumstance in the story, which at first sight seems strange and unaccountable,—the sudden return, merely for half a dozen words, to the use of a language which the children did not understand—was really of the utmost service in preserving and accrediting the whole narrative; and it would be but reasonable to conclude, therefore, that a similar beneficial purpose may have been attained by the use of the same language in the beginning, even though we were utterly unable to conjecture what that purpose could have been.

But to return to the other difficulty which was suggested by the *Times*—How could the children understand and retain what was said to them in a foreign language? We will first lay before our readers the answer given by the children themselves to this inquiry, for it would be hard to find any *real* difficulty in the narrative which has not long since been proposed by other inquirers, and received a solution in this way. “You never went to school,” asked M. l’Abbé Lagier, “you did not understand French; how then were you able to remember what the Lady said to you? Did she repeat it over and over again?” “Oh, no,” said Mélanie, “she only told it me once, and yet I remembered it all perfectly; and besides, even though I did not understand it well myself, yet as long as I repeated what she said to me, it would be understood by those who understood French; and this was quite enough, even though I should not understand it myself:” that is to say, it was not in the least essential that she should comprehend the *meaning* of what was said to her; she was a mere instrument, or channel, through which it was to pass to the people; and as long as she fulfilled this function by repeating the *words* correctly, it was every thing that was required. As to the difficulty *how* she could retain and repeat words she did not understand, the child disposed of it much in the same way as in our school-days we were wont to dispose of the old problem of the race between Achilles and the tortoise; *solvitur ambulando*; “she only told me once, and yet I remembered it all perfectly:” “this is the *fact*,” she seems to say; “I leave it to you to account for it in the best way you can,

and to draw from it what inference you please." And certainly it is impossible, without prejudging the whole question, to say that this fact *could not have been*. We are discussing a particular feature in a story professedly miraculous, and it is idle therefore to say, "this could not have been, because it is miraculous;" rather we should remember, with Sir Philip Sydney, that "a wonder is no wonder in a wonderful subject;" and in this light the difficulty of the *Times* entirely disappears. But the truth is, the "wonder" does not happen to be so very "wonderful" after all. Doubtless, it would be a very wonderful thing, if we were to listen to an hour's sermon preached in his native tongue by a Dutch Puritan, and straightway to come home and repeat it *verbatim* to our friends; but there would be nothing very surprising in our bringing away with tolerable correctness half a dozen sentences that had been addressed to us in broad Scotch. Now, the difference between pure French and the *patois* spoken at La Salette is not the difference between two distinct languages, but only between two dialects of the same language. We wish we were able to translate into *patois* the few sentences which the children had to remember in French, and then our readers would see for themselves the exact amount of the difference; but though we cannot do this, yet we can do what will be quite as efficient for the purpose; viz. set before them a passage of what was spoken in *patois*, but has since been translated into French:

Si la récolta se gasta, eï ré què pèr vous aouetrès. Vous l'aïou fa veirè l'an passa pèr las truffas, n'aya pas fa cas. Era oou countrèrè; quand n'èn trou-bava de gastas, jurava, l'y bitava lou noum dè moun fis. Van continua que pèr chalèndas n'y oueré plus.

Si la récolte se gâte, ce n'est rien que pour vous autres. Je vous l'ai fait voir l'année passée par les pommes de terre, vous n'en avez pas fait cas. C'était au contraire; quand vous en trouviez de gâtées, vous juriez; vous mettiez le nom de mon fils. Elles vont continuer, que pour la Noël il n'y en aura plus.

We have taken the first sentence that presented itself, which is, as far as we can see, a very fair specimen of the whole; and it is obvious that there is nothing so very marvellous and impossible in supposing that a child, whose ordinary language was that which is printed in the left of these columns, should yet have been capable of retaining and partially understanding, even without any special or supernatural assistance, half a dozen short sentences-spoken in the language printed in the right.

"But," says the *Times*, "if these children had some faint knowledge of the French language, it seems strange that they should have broken down at the phrase, *pommes de terre*." Whether this is strange, or not, depends entirely on the na-



ture of the relation which exists between the *patois* and the French; a subject on which our very imperfect knowledge of the former forbids us to express any positive opinion. We know nothing of the *patois* but what can be gathered from the specimens now before us in the narratives of Maximin and Mélanie; and we do not feel that this is sufficient to warrant us in making a satisfactory induction. If, however, we may be guided by the (probably) analogous case of the varieties of the Italian language in the different states of that peninsula, it is precisely in these common "household words" that the difference between the pure French and the corrupted *patois* may be expected to be the most striking and important. Of course, no one who is familiar with the Italian language in Rome would find any difficulty in making himself understood among the educated classes any where in Italy; but if he came to talk to his servants, and to others in that sphere of life, in Naples, for example, he would find it necessary to learn many new names for the most common and familiar objects. It is true that he would find also a different accent, occasional uncouth terminations, several varieties in the inflections of nouns and verbs; but all these would be but slight impediments in the way of his understanding others, or being understood himself, when compared with the impediment that arises from the use of a totally different word. We see nothing strange, then, or improbable, in supposing that these poor children of La Salette may have followed, and almost fully comprehended, every thing that "the Lady" had said to them, even though she were speaking in French and they only knew *patois*, until she came to this particular point, where the words *pommes de terres*, as a substitute for *truffas*, thoroughly perplexed them. We see nothing strange in supposing that the children of peasants and servants of farmers, although familiar with this latter word, had never even heard of the former. The strangeness, if strangeness there be, ought certainly to be more keenly felt by Frenchmen, and particularly by the inhabitants of that immediate neighbourhood, than by others living at a distance; yet we cannot find that this is a point which has ever been mooted in the thousand and one discussions of which this whole history has been the subject. We conclude, therefore, that it cannot be really so singular a circumstance as the writer in the *Times* seems to have felt it to be; and certainly we are not disposed to abandon all our other grounds of belief in the story on the strength of this single objection.

Having now sufficiently examined all the objections which have been alleged against the details of the children's story, the next subject of inquiry which awaits us is the character

and conduct of those by whom it was told. What was the character and position of Maximin and Mélanie in the autumn of 1846, and how have they behaved themselves ever since? Born of parents in the very lowest class of society, and in a part of the country where the people were notorious for inattention to their religious duties, they had been brought up in the grossest ignorance, both secular and religious. The girl was nearly fifteen years of age; but having been at service ever since she was nine or ten, and having been made by her masters to work on Sundays and holydays almost as constantly as during the week, she had a most imperfect knowledge of the doctrines of the Christian faith; she could not repeat two lines of catechism, and had not been admitted, therefore, to make her first communion with the other children of her age. She is described as being naturally timid, careless, idle, and disobedient; her memory and intellectual capabilities were so feeble that, even at the age of sixteen, after having been taught to repeat twice every day for a twelvemonth the acts of faith, hope, and charity, she could not be trusted to recite them correctly by herself; matters which many of the children in our poor schools of the age of seven or eight, or even less, would recite with the utmost facility. She has now for six years been under the care of the Sisters of Providence, and the training which she has received during this period has of course considerably strengthened and improved her mental faculties; we were told, however, by the chaplain of the convent where she is now a novice, that they were still certainly below the average. This fact was not apparent in the course of the conversation which we had with her ourselves, for we talked only about the history of the apparition; and upon this subject, as we shall presently have occasion to observe, both the children have always displayed a degree of sharpness and ability altogether beyond their natural powers. The convent of the Sisters of Providence, in which Mélanie now is, is situated about two or three miles from Grenoble, and it is expected that she will take the veil there in the course of a few months. Through the kindness of the chaplain and the Mother Superior, we had an interview with her on the day before we went to La Salette. We proposed to her all the questions which we had previously prepared, or which occurred to us at the moment, relative to this or that circumstance of the history in which she had borne so prominent a part; and certainly, as far as we may allow our judgment upon the subject-matter of human testimony to be influenced by the personal demeanour of the witness—and there is no one who has ever watched the progress of a judicial

proceeding who is not conscious of such an influence; and, indeed, it is universally accepted as a legitimate topic for the commentaries of the advocate and the consideration of the jury—the impression which she left upon our minds was most favourable. Her singular simplicity and modesty of manners was most prepossessing; and the ready straightforwardness of her replies seemed thoroughly incompatible with all idea of cunning and deceit. We hope indeed that most of our readers will agree with us in considering that in this particular instance there is no real necessity for insisting upon these minute details. The other internal evidences of truth which the story possesses are too numerous and striking to be destroyed by any mere awkwardness or embarrassment that might be exhibited by one of the witnesses undergoing a critical examination. However, it is well to know that not even this fault can be alleged against either of these two children; they have, from the very first, uniformly maintained the same calmness of demeanour, the same promptitude in replying to all questions that are proposed, and the same facility in disposing of all objections, that we ourselves witnessed on this particular occasion in our interview with the girl. The boy we did not see; for he is in the ecclesiastical seminary of the diocese, at some distance from Grenoble; but we received an accurate account of him from those who knew him well. He, too, was of poor natural abilities, and grossly ignorant at the time of the apparition. His father testifies that it was a work of three or four years to teach him the Our Father and Hail Mary; and when he was taken into the school of the Sisters of Providence, at the age of eleven years, a twelvemonth's instruction was not sufficient to enable him to serve Mass. His indolence too, and love of play, retard the progress of his studies almost more than any natural deficiency of mental powers. When once he had begun to learn, he was very anxious to become an ecclesiastic, and means have been afforded him to gratify this desire; as far, at least, as man *can* help him, that is, as far as his education is concerned. We are assured, however, that there is but little chance of his realising this object of his wishes. He seems to be incapable of steady, persevering application; yet he is no genius who can dispense with such labour, and, indeed, the utter ignorance in which his earlier years were spent renders the necessity of study doubly imperative upon him.

These, then, are the children who, on the evening of the 19th of September, 1846, came down from the mountain, and told the wonderful story which we have narrated; and we think we need not say another word to shew that they were



at least incapable of *inventing* such a story. Had the message which they professed to have received, and to be commissioned to deliver to the people, been short and simple,—had it consisted of a single sentence,—or had it confined itself to a mere general exhortation to greater strictness and holiness of life, and a general denouncement of evils to come if the people did not repent, the case would have been very different. In this case, though it might have been difficult to have conceived any adequate motive that could have induced the children to invent such a tale, still it would not have been a self-evident absurdity to suggest the suspicion. But now, looking at the message as it really stands, considering its length, the minuteness of its announcements, the boldness and accuracy of its predictions, and the whole character of the language in which it is couched, every one can see at once that the idea of two ignorant peasant children having been the authors of such a narrative is simply preposterous.

But if the story be not true, and if the children were not the authors of it, it must needs be either that they were the instruments and accomplices of the author, or else the victims of some extraordinary ocular or mental delusion. The refutation of this latter hypothesis may safely be left to the common sense of our readers; and the same may be said also of the idea suggested by the *Times*, of a “got-up apparition.” Had the scene of the plot been laid in some thick wood, and in “the witching hour of night,” we might have thought differently; but a “got-up apparition” at noonday, when there was not a single cloud in the heavens, and on the summit of a bare mountain, where not a tree or a shrub is to be seen, is simply impossible. It remains, therefore, to inquire whether the children may not have been the conscious accomplices of some third party yet undiscovered; for, if the story be not true, this is the only explanation of the matter that deserves a moment’s consideration. Yet that even this too is utterly inadmissible, it will not be difficult to demonstrate, by observing what has been the conduct of the children subsequently to their first announcement of the marvel.

It has been already mentioned that they were strangers to one another until the day before the alleged apparition; the boy had only been in the village of La Salette for five days altogether, and both the place and the occupation being new to him, his master had felt himself obliged to accompany him every day, and to remain in his immediate neighbourhood at work, that so he might always have an eye upon him; and he deposes that during the whole of this week the two children had not been in one another’s company until the Friday,

Then on the Sunday they were separated again; the boy returned to Corps, the girl remained at La Salette; and they never met, save only to be examined from time to time by some of the numerous visitors, until the following Christmas. At that time the girl was taken into a poor-school kept by some religious in Corps, and the boy frequented the same school as a day-scholar. Strangers frequently came to interrogate the children, both separately and together; and sometimes these strangers took the boy away with them for a day or two to go and point out the precise spot upon the mountain; but it was never observed that on any of these occasions the children shewed the slightest desire to come together after the examination was over, in order that they might "compare notes" as to the questions that had been asked and the answers given. On the contrary, it was notorious that they *never* sought one another's society at any time; there was a perfect indifference between them; neither cared to learn how or by whom the other had been examined; nor did they ever make it a subject of conversation with their school-fellows. They were always ready to see anybody who came to question them upon the subject, and their answers were always prompt to the inquiries that were put to them; but they neither talked of it unnecessarily to their companions, nor consulted together beforehand as to what they should say, nor communicated to one another afterwards the result of the examination. They never seemed in the slightest degree anxious or oppressed, as with the consciousness of some great mystery in which they had a part to play; but the whole thing appeared to sit lightly and naturally upon them, like any other fact in their past history, which it was not necessary for them ever to speak about, but if interrogated upon, there was no reason why they should hesitate to answer; and in this free and unembarrassed way they have undergone the examination of thousands of curious and cunning inquirers, of priests and bishops, lawyers, magistrates and judges, during a period of six years, and yet have never been detected in any untruth or contradiction.

And here also seems the most proper place to mention another feature in the conduct of the children which it would be hard to reconcile with the idea of their being parties to any fraud in the matter: we allude to the wonderful fidelity with which they kept the secret which they said had been entrusted to their charge. Our space will not allow us to enumerate all the various ways by which it has been attempted from time to time to extort from them, if not the secret itself which they had been forbidden to disclose, yet at least some petty circumstance connected with it, against which there was

no such prohibition; as, for instance, whether it was of public or private concern, whether it was good news or bad, whether the time would ever come for revealing it, &c. &c. We will select, as a single specimen of what the children have had to undergo upon this head from a multitude of persons, the following account of the attempts that were made by Monsignor Dupanloup, the distinguished Bishop of Orleans. It is taken from a letter addressed by himself to one of his private friends, on the 11th of June, 1848. He says,

“I cannot help seeing in the fidelity with which the children have kept their secret a strong token of their truth. Each has maintained, for the last two years, that he is in possession of a certain secret; yet neither pretends that he knows the other's. Their parents, their masters, their parish priests, their companions, thousands of pilgrims have questioned them on this subject; the most incredible efforts have been made to wrest from them some sort of revelation about it; but neither love nor money, neither promises nor threats, neither the civil authorities nor the ecclesiastical, have been able to make the slightest impression upon them in this matter; so that at this very day, after two years of continual efforts, nothing, *absolutely nothing* is known about it. I myself made the most earnest endeavours to penetrate this secret; and certain accidental circumstances helped me to push my endeavours further than most others perhaps, and at one moment I really thought I was succeeding. . . . I am bound to confess, however, that all my efforts were perfectly fruitless; at the instant that I fancied I was compassing my end and going to obtain something, all my hopes vanished; all that I fondly imagined that I had got, suddenly escaped me, and one answer of the child plunged me again in all my former uncertainty.”

He then goes on to relate the different ways in which he tried to overcome the boy's constancy, and to wrest from him some portion of his secret. It happened that he had a little travelling-bag with him which opened by a secret spring, without any lock and key. The boy's curiosity was greatly excited by seeing this bag opened and shut in so mysterious a manner. He examined it in all directions; and not being able to discover the spring, he begged Monsignor Dupanloup to shew it him. The prelate agreed to do so, on condition that the child would, in like manner, reveal *his* secret. It was in vain that the boy pleaded the great difference there was between them; that there was a prohibition in the one case, and none in the other. The bishop—or professor rather, for he was not then raised to the see of Orleans—would hear of no other condition. Ten times in the day did the boy return to the charge, and always with the same result. The professor did all he could to excite his eager curiosity more and more,



and then declared his willingness to satisfy it, if only he would tell him *something*, though it were ever so little, about this mysterious secret. But the moment the words of temptation were spoken, the boy's whole tone and manner were immediately changed; his curiosity seemed altogether to vanish, and he became grave and serious. At last, after the lapse of several hours, the professor relented, and shewed him the secret spring. But it was only to attack him by another weapon; for he now appealed to his generosity. The boy seemed to feel the reproach, but was still silent; "and I remained convinced," says M. Dupanloup, "as any one else would be who knows what human indiscretion is—and especially the indiscretion of children—that the lad had victoriously withstood one of the most violent moral temptations that can well be imagined." The professor, however, having come from a considerable distance, on purpose that he might thoroughly investigate this matter upon the spot, was not going to abandon his project because he had been twice or three times baffled. He reopened his attack, and in a more serious way. He tried what bribery would do. First he gave the boy himself some trifling presents of pictures, a new hat and a blouse; and then he got him to talk about the poverty and distress of his father; after which he proceeded to promise that his father should not be allowed to want for any thing, but should be enabled to live at home in ease and comfort all the rest of his days, if only the boy would tell him—not the whole secret, but only such portion as he *might* tell without breaking his promise. M. Dupanloup says that he inwardly reproached himself all the time for making the boy undergo such temptations; what the inward feelings of the boy were we do not know; we only know that he always simply and unhesitatingly answered, "No, sir, I cannot." Once more did this indefatigable tormentor renew his attack upon the child, and perhaps this last was the severest trial of all; still it met with no better success than its predecessors. As he was packing up his baggage at the inn, he allowed the boy to meddle with every thing as though it had been his own. Amongst other things, he laid hold of M. Dupanloup's purse, in which there happened to be a considerable sum of gold. Instantly he opened the purse, turned out its contents upon the table, and was soon absorbed in arranging and rearranging them in several little heaps. When M. Dupanloup saw that the child was thoroughly enchanted by the sight and handling of so much money, he told him with the utmost gravity, and really meaning what he said, that all this gold should be his, for his own use and that of his father, and that it should be given him

then and there upon the spot, if only he would consent to reveal what little he might feel himself at liberty to reveal about the secret intrusted to his charge. The result of this most trying temptation shall be told in M. Dupanloup's own words.

"Then I witnessed a most singular moral phenomenon, which still strikes me with astonishment as I recount it to you. The child had been entirely absorbed by the gold; he was delighted to look at it, to handle and to count it. All on a sudden he became quite sad at hearing what I said, abruptly left the table where the temptation was before him and said, 'Sir, I cannot.' 'And yet,' said I, 'there is money enough there to make both you and your father very comfortable.' Again his only reply was the same; 'Sir, I cannot;' uttered in a tone so firm and simple that I felt I was vanquished. Unwilling to confess as much, however, I added in a tone of assumed displeasure, contempt, and irony, 'Perhaps you won't tell me your secret because you have none to tell; it's all a mere joke.' He did not seem to be the least offended by these words, but answered briskly, 'Oh, but I have though; only I can't tell it.' 'Why not? Who has forbidden you?' 'The Holy Virgin.' Henceforth I gave up the useless contest. I felt that the dignity of the child was superior to my own. Placing my hand with respect and affection upon his head, I made the sign of the cross upon his forehead, and said, 'Adieu, my child; I trust that the Blessed Virgin will excuse the solicitations I have addressed to you: be faithful all your life to the grace you have received:' and in a few minutes we parted to see each other no more. Whoever will well consider what the nature of children is," adds the bishop, "how light, and fickle, and unsteady, and talkative, and indiscreet, and curious they are, and then shall make the same experiments that I have made, will certainly share also in the astonishment which I have felt, and cannot fail to ask himself whether it is by the two children that he is being thus baffled, or whether it is not rather by some higher and divine power."\*

The testimony of this distinguished ecclesiastic is so full and precise, and his observations upon it so clear and convincing, that we will not run the risk of weakening the impression it may have made upon our readers by adding another word upon this branch of our subject. We will pass on at once to another kindred feature in the case, which in some respects perhaps is even yet more surprising. We have seen how, on all matters concerned with the miraculous story of "the Lady's" apparition, the moral character of the children has risen above itself, superior to the strongest and most trying temptations; we shall now see how, in their intellectual capacities also, they have manifested a similar superiority. On all other subjects they have always been slow, dull, and

\* The whole of this most interesting and important letter may be seen in *Some Account of the Apparition of La Salette*. Burns and Lambert.

stupid; but upon this one subject of the apparition, their quickness and ingenuity has amazed and confounded their examiners; and yet without the children seeming to be the least elated by, or even conscious of, the triumph they had achieved. Their most brilliant and profound replies have been given with precisely the same natural ease and simplicity as other answers in no way surprising; and no one has ever seen so much as a smile upon their countenances, even when their victory has been most complete. A few specimens must suffice. Did one who had examined them profess to disbelieve the whole story, and to treat the children as wicked impostors? They answered with an air of the utmost unconcern, "The Lady charged us to repeat what she had said; she gave us no commission to make you believe it." Did another taunt them as to the non-fulfilment of the threats which the Lady had uttered? Immediately they replied, that that was no concern of theirs, but only of the Lady who had spoken to them; or at another time they objected to the same taunt the fact of the people's repentance. When a priest asked them whether they were not tired of repeating the same tale over and over again day after day, the retort was instantly ready, "And you, sir, are you tired of saying Mass every day?"—"The lady who taught you all that story on the mountain has been discovered, and she is now in prison at Grenoble," was the abrupt announcement of a stranger to them one day; they only answered, "He will be a clever fellow who catches her."—"But the lady was no real person at all," it was said on another occasion; "your eyes were deceived; it was merely a bright luminous cloud which seemed to assume that shape." "But bright luminous clouds don't make long speeches."—"I quite believe in the truth of all you have told me," was the apparently candid acknowledgment of a very clever ecclesiastic; "but it was not a messenger from heaven who spoke to you, but rather the Father of lies, disguised as an angel of light and seeking to sow disorder and falsehood in the Church." "But the devil would not be anxious to make us keep holy the Sunday, to behave well in church, and not to swear and blaspheme; besides, the devil would not carry a cross."—"Why not?" replied the priest; "we read in the Bible that he once carried our Lord Himself to Jerusalem and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and if he was able to do this with the living body of Christ, *à fortiori* he might well carry a mere image of Christ, a crucifix." "Nay," said the child, "but I am sure that God would never allow him to carry His Cross like that."—"But why not?" insisted the priest, "if he once carried Him-



self?" "*Because by the Cross He saved the world.*" When the other child, or the same child on another occasion, was pressed by the same difficulty, the answer was still more touching and more utterly beyond their age and natural capacities: "Yes," said the child, "that may have happened when our Lord was upon earth, *but He was not then glorified.*"

Let any one turn over these answers seriously in his mind, —and if we were not afraid of wearying our readers, we could fill our pages with many more such,—let him consider the extraordinary simplicity, yet no less singular appositeness of some of them, the beauty and profound philosophy of others, and the thorough satisfactoriness of all; and then let him ask himself whether it is within the range of human possibility that this should be the language of dull and ignorant children, who have been tutored to play a certain part in a public imposture? Who could have foreseen these questions? Who suggested these answers? Even granting that it had been possible, by dint of most assiduous perseverance, so far to overcome the natural stupidity of these children, as that they should faithfully retain in their memory the very words of a long and difficult discourse, and never vary in their repetition of it; yet what merely human genius could have so thoroughly apprehended the whole compass of the objections that might be raised against the narrative, as to have primed the children with answers to them all? and what merely human prudence could have sufficed so clearly to arrange these questions and answers, and so deeply to impress them upon the children's minds, as that they should never be at a loss, or confound one answer with another? These are considerations which it behoves those who scoff at the history of La Salette, and will not believe that the finger of God is there, seriously to examine and satisfactorily to explain. Let them not run off into idle declamations against priestcraft, prostration of intellect, superstition and credulity; but let them deal soberly with the facts which have been adduced, and suggest some reasonable interpretation of them other than that which we propose, viz. the truth of the apparition. We know, indeed, that there were once those upon earth to whom it had been expressly forbidden to "take thought how or what to speak," because it should be "given them in that hour what to speak," and we know that Almighty God might render the same supernatural assistance to any other persons whom from time to time He chose to accredit as His messengers. We know also that "out of the mouth of infants and of sucklings He has perfected praise;" that He "has chosen the foolish things of the world that He may confound the wise, and the weak things of

the world that He may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are."\* All this we know; and therefore, if it be allowed that the history which we have told is a true history, and that the apparition of our Blessed Lady to the children of La Salette was the act of Almighty God, every difficulty disappears. The event takes its place at once amongst a class and order of events where the incongruities we have pointed out are no incongruities at all, but in the strictest harmony with every thing about them. Twelve poor ignorant fishermen confound the wisdom of philosophers, and convert the world; this is the type of God's dealings with mankind under the Christian dispensation; and it is a type with which, if we may be allowed to compare things of such unequal magnitude, the history now before us faithfully corresponds.

But that two dull and ignorant children should consistently maintain during a period of six years, in spite of all kinds of threats and promises, a lying tale of their own invention, or that had been taught them by another; that they should, during this same period, answer in the most unhesitating manner to every question that was proposed to them, upon the spur of the moment, and without the possibility of previous confederation, and yet that these answers should never be contradictory, and often most profound; that they should impose upon the public, both lay and clerical, and even upon the Sovereign Pontiff himself;—this is a phenomenon which certainly does *not* harmonise with the general history of the world around us. The history of the sanctuary of La Salette, taken in the order of things divine, is not extraordinary; taken as a merely human affair, in which the finger of God has had no part, it is quite inexplicable.

We have dwelt at such length upon the internal evidence in favour of the story of the apparition of La Salette, to be derived either from an examination of the narrative itself, or from the conduct of the children towards it, or from any other of its own intrinsic circumstances, that want of space obliges us to pass over in a very hurried way such external evidence as can be adduced for it. It is briefly this: first, the new spring of water upon the mountain; secondly, the universal acceptance which the story has met with throughout the Christian world; and thirdly, the fact of many miracles having been wrought upon persons believing it and calling upon our Blessed Lady of La Salette for extraordinary help and

\* St. Matt. x. 19; Ps. viii. 3; 1 Cor. i. 27.

assistance. The first of these facts cannot of course be any thing more than an indirect confirmation of the story told by the children ; but certainly it is at least as much as this, and ought not therefore to be set aside as of no value. The children affirm that they saw a lady sitting on a particular spot, and that this lady communicated to them certain intelligence which they were to impart to the people. The people are attracted by curiosity to go and visit the spot, and they find that an abundant fountain of very pure water is flowing there, where on the day before there had been no water at all. The writer in the *Times*, either wilfully or being misled by a careless reporter, confounds this new fountain with the stream to which the cows were always taken to drink ; the truth is, that it rises on a higher level, and its waters only run into the old stream at about the distance of fifteen or twenty yards. And not only are there many witnesses to prove that, whereas it was dry at noonday on Saturday the 19th of September, 1846, it was flowing copiously in the afternoon of Sunday the 20th ; but also the whole population of the neighbourhood have now had the experience of six years, during the whole of which time they have observed that it has never ceased to flow ; yet they knew that before the apparition it was a most irregular and intermittent stream. Here, then, is a plain sensible change in one of the phenomena of nature upon this mountain-top ; and it falls in with, and to a certain degree corroborates, the children's story ; and at least it certainly predisposes the minds of those to whose knowledge it has been brought, to accept a story which seems to account for the change, and is otherwise well attested.

But secondly, the story has met with universal acceptance ; and this, again, is an argument in favour of its truth. The *Times*, indeed, endeavours to throw ridicule upon this reasoning : " Each pilgrim," it says, " is supposed to bear witness to the truth of the original story, by affording his presence in confirmation of the fact." This of course is a gross misrepresentation of what has been urged by the advocates for the reality of the apparition ; it is to have recourse to that dishonest argument known to our logical readers as the fallacy of Division and Composition. We say that the acceptance of the story by the whole Catholic world is an argument for its truth ; but it suits the purpose of our adversaries to represent us as saying that its acceptance by each individual Catholic is *toties quoties* a separate and independent argument in its favour. The difference is palpable ; and but few words are needed to shew that the argument, as we have here stated it, is sound and trustworthy. Every one who is familiar with



works written upon the evidences of Christianity must have met with it again and again. It is a very common observation, and one that cannot be gainsayed, that the universal acceptance of the Gospel would be more extraordinary on the supposition of its falsehood than it is on the supposition of its truth; and the same may be said of the case before us. How did the tale of two peasant children command the assent and belief, first of those living upon the spot or in its neighbourhood, and then of the faithful generally throughout France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and other Catholic countries? How did their feeble voice suffice to bring together on the first anniversary of the apparition upwards of sixty thousand pilgrims from different parts of the earth? Their tale had been most rudely handled by those public journals which habitually laugh to scorn every thing that is religious; on the other hand, it had not yet been endorsed by the ecclesiastical authority; it stood therefore entirely upon its own merits; and nevertheless it was believed by hundreds and by thousands; and at this moment it has not only outlived all opposition, but it has won, not a mere unreasoning assent, but a most deep and hearty devotion from the great majority of the faithful. *Vox populi, vox Dei.*

The third and last point of external evidence which we mentioned was the evidence of miracles—that is, of miraculous cures that have been wrought in connexion with a belief in this apparition, and, as it would appear, in confirmation of that belief. This is a very large subject, and one which, to those for whom we are at present writing, it is scarcely of any use, perhaps, that we should enter upon. It is worth while to attempt to prove the reality of an apparition by the evidence of a miracle, when one is arguing with a Catholic who believes in the reality of many other supernatural apparitions, but only questions the sufficiency of evidence for this or that particular instance of them; but it can have no tendency to remove the prejudices of those in whom the real obstacle to belief is not any doubt about the sufficiency of evidence in this particular case, but rather a general unbelief in the existence of such things at all. Nevertheless, it seems to be essential to the completeness of our subject, and a few words therefore, shall be said upon it.

In the autumn of 1847 there was in Avallon, a town in the archdiocese of Sens, on the high road between Auxerre and Chalons-sur-Saône, a lady named Marie-Pierrette Gagniard, the greater part of whose life had been spent in continual suffering. She was then aged about thirty-two, and for the last seventeen years she had been always under medical care for very grave and acute maladies; indeed her maladies had been

so bad that in one single year she had received the last sacraments three times. She had lost the use of her left eye ever since she was an infant, from an attack of small-pox; the eyelid was closed, and could with difficulty be made to open. On the 12th of July, 1845, she lost the sight of the other eye also, and became totally blind, and the doctor attributed this misfortune to a cancer in the head. His own medical account of the matter stands thus: "July 12, 1845. Sensation of some foreign substance in the right eye, and convulsive movements of the same, so that one could see nothing but the *sclerotica*. The following day the upper lid had fallen; and from that time forward no efforts, however violent, could succeed in forcing it open further than to catch a glimpse of the eyeball, which seemed to be rolling about in a most frightful manner. As the other eye had been lost from her infancy, Pierrette Gagniard was now completely blind; she could not even distinguish the day from the night." Three months afterwards the whole of her left side was paralysed. In the month of April, 1847, there began a discharge (through the mouth) of very offensive matter, as from a purulent ulcer. This continued at intervals for a period of eight months, spite of the most energetic treatment by the medical men of the place. It was particularly bad on the 29th of November, 1847, and the doctor promised to come and bleed her the next morning. Some unexpected summons prevented him from keeping his engagement; and when he came on the 1st of December, he found that it was no longer necessary; the discharge had stopped suddenly on the previous day. His patient had heard of what was said to be the *miraculous* cure of a near neighbour of hers, who had suffered even more acutely than herself and for an equal length of time. It was told her that this lady had been suddenly and completely cured at the end of a novena, or nine days' prayer, to our Lady of La Salette, with the use also of some of the water brought from that fountain. She was naturally anxious to have recourse to the same *Salus infirmorum*; a good nun in the town who was in the frequent habit of visiting her, promised to bring some of the water every day, and it was agreed that the novena should end on the 8th of December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. It was begun therefore on the 30th of November, and on that day, as we have seen, the discharge of matter entirely ceased. Her headaches, however, her blindness, her loathing of food, and all her other maladies continued with the same intensity until seven o'clock in the morning of the 8th of December, when she received the holy communion as she lay upon her sick bed. Within an hour afterwards, she

fell into a sound sleep, such as she had not enjoyed before for many years, and she slept for three or four hours, until she was awake by some one coming into her room. She now was conscious of the light, which had not been the case for more than two years before, and she shed abundant tears. Encouraged by these symptoms, she proceeded to get up, which she found she could do without difficulty or fatigue. Two or three hours later, the nun paid her daily visit, and pouring the few drops of water that remained upon a handkerchief, applied it to her eyes. Immediately she exclaimed that she saw the nun's crucifix, then that she saw her whole figure; and in another minute she was able to recognise every body in the room and all the neighbours who came crowding in to see her; and in the evening she read her prayer-book as easily as though she had never lost the use of this right eye at all.

These facts were solemnly attested both by the patient herself, by many of her relations, friends, and neighbours, and by the doctor who attended her; and the latter concludes his deposition with these words, "It being impossible, as I believe, to explain these facts by the ordinary laws of science, *je ne crains pas de m'incliner devant ce qui est possible à Dieu.*" And you, reader, are you too of the same opinion? Is this the conclusion which you would have drawn from the same facts? are you, too, ready to bow before the hand of God, and to recognise in this cure no merely natural effect, no singular coincidence, no result of ordinary medical treatment, but the visible seal, as it were, of God's approbation of the supernatural means of remedy to which the sufferer had had recourse? You will have observed how the cessation of one of the patient's maladies synchronised with the commencement of her novena, and how the cessation of the rest crowned the conclusion of it; the final blessing of all, the restoration of her sight, following immediately on the application of some of the water from La Salette. This happy synchronism, however, is far from being all that the Church requires, when she is called upon to take cognisance of matters of this kind with a view to pronouncing a judgment upon them; and the history we have narrated did *not* satisfy the severe scrutiny of the ecclesiastical authorities, and the Archbishop of Sens refused to pronounce it a certain miracle. Not that there was any doubt as to the authenticity of the facts; far from it; these were established beyond all possible cavil by abundant testimony, down to the most minute particulars, as they have been now described; but the Vicar-General of the diocese, who had been deputed to examine into the case, fancied that he could detect in these facts certain circumstances which caused them



to fall short of what the holy jealousy of the Church requires before she pronounces a cure to be miraculous. He says, in his report addressed to the Archbishop: "First, it is not proved to my satisfaction that Marie-Pierrette Gagniard was really what is properly called blind; secondly, I think one may explain her cure by natural means, without having recourse to the Divine interposition by a miracle." The first of these observations he justifies by making a distinction between the loss of the *faculty* of seeing, and the mere loss of the *use* of sight; *e. g.* in many persons who are really blind the eyelids are open, and an unscientific observer does not recognise any fault in the outward appearance of the eye; but these persons have not the faculty or power of seeing; they are really blind; and to restore sight to such an one would be really miraculous. But there are others who still retain the power of seeing, yet are deprived of the present use of that power, owing to some injury that has been inflicted on the optic nerve, or some temporary and accidental derangement of the mechanism of the eye, such as (in the present instance) inability to raise the eyelids; when this temporary evil is removed, the patient recovers, *not* the power of seeing, which he had never lost, but only the use of his sight; and these cases are quite within the range of medical skill. Having established this distinction, he proceeds to give his reasons for considering that the recovery of this lady may have been brought about by merely natural means. We will not attempt to follow him through all the medical details of his report (for the whole discussion turns entirely upon these), but content ourselves with a very brief summary.

" 'This lady,' he says, 'was considered by the doctor to have an abscess somewhere in her head; the natural end of every abscess is suppuration; such an end was attained in the present instance: when suppuration is complete, the inflammation diminishes, and by and by altogether ceases; then the other symptoms of which the inflammation was the true cause, cease also, and the patient is cured. This seems to me the history of the present case; the suppuration was complete, we may suppose, on the 30th of November, when the discharge ceased; after so severe an illness, a week is not too long a period to allow for the gradual cessation of the inflammation and its consequences; the sound sleep on the morning of the 8th of December greatly facilitating the process of recovery; and in fact we observe that the recovery was altogether gradual; she was sensible of the presence of light two or three hours before she was able to distinguish objects. The whole thing was gradual, and therefore may have been natural. Far be it from me to wish to derogate from the power and goodness of God, and to say that this recovery may not have been a special blessing conferred by Him at the intercession of the Blessed

Virgin Mary upon one of her faithful children ; I only say, and I am confident that your Grace will agree with me in saying, that where the natural laws of reason and science furnish us with an explanation of certain phenomena, even though that explanation be not thoroughly satisfactory and convincing, *yet if it be only plausible*, we ought not indiscreetly to declare that there has been an interference with those laws by a divine miracle. In a word, the case before us cannot be said to satisfy all the conditions laid down by the Church as essential to the proof of a really miraculous cure ; it *may be* miraculous, but it has not been *proved* to be such. In particular, it does not altogether satisfy either the first, second, fourth, or sixth of the following canons laid down by Benedict XIV. in his work *De Canonizatione Sanctorum*, lib. iv. pars 1, cap. 8, no. 2.:

Ut sanatio a morbis inter miracula censeatur, plura debent occurrere :

1. Ut morbus sit gravis, et vel *impossibilis*, vel curatu difficilis ;

2. Ut morbus qui depellitur, *non sit in ultimâ parte statûs*, ita ut non multo post declinare debeat ;

3. Ut nulla fuerint adhibita medicamenta, vel si fuerint adhibita, certum sit ea non profuisse ;

4. Ut *sanatio sit subita et momentanea* ;

5. Ut sanatio sit perfecta, non manca aut concisa ;

6. Ut nulla notatu digna evacuatio, seu *crisis præcedat temporibus debitis*, et cum causâ ; si enim ita accidat, tunc vere prodigiosa sanatio dicenda non erit, sed vel ex toto, vel ex parte naturalis ;

7. Ut sublatus morbus non redeat."

It is sufficiently clear, we think, that in the archdiocese of Sens there is no danger of the episcopal sanction being rashly given to the report of any alleged miracle ; yet in the very same official document from which we have made these extracts, the Vicar-General goes on to inform his diocesan that he does not see how he can withhold that sanction from the report of another miraculous cure, into which he had been ordered to inquire, and which had taken place a few weeks before that whose history we have now given, in the same town of Avallon. Accordingly, on the 4th of March, 1849, the Archbishop published a decree in which he makes no mention whatever of the cure of Marie-Pierrette Gagniard ; but declares concerning the other case, of Antoinette Bollenat, that after the most mature examination, it is found to present all the essential characteristics and conditions of a miraculous cure. We abstain from entering upon the details of this case, only because we wish to be as brief as possible ; and we have special reasons, which will presently appear, for taking *another* case, as the one only instance we shall give of a miracle, wrought in confirmation of the apparition at La Salette, which *has* received episcopal sanction.

On the 16th of April, 1846, when the community of nuns known by the name of the religious of St. Joseph were being

removed from one establishment to another in the city of Avignon, the whole population of the place saw one of the sisters being transported in a litter, because she was unable to bear removal in any other way. She had been a member of that community for twelve years; during the last eight of which she had had many severe illnesses, which terminated at last in a confirmed consumption. She was obliged to keep her bed, and only attempted to hear Mass five or six times in the year; being carried to the chapel to gratify her own earnest desire, but soon brought back again in a state of insensibility, having fainted from fatigue. On the 14th of February, 1847, she received Extreme Unction; and the holy Viaticum was administered to her two or three times more in the course of the next month. Both the doctors who attended her had pronounced her case desperate, and had warned the sisters that they might expect her death at any moment, without any premonitory symptoms whatever; for that the marvel was what kept her alive from day to day. The only food that she took were a few teaspoonfuls of milk and water, or very weak broth; and she seemed in the last stage of exhaustion. Whilst Sister St. Charles (this was her name in religion) was lying in this state, the reverend superioress of the house heard rumours of miracles that were said to be wrought by the use of water from the fountain of La Salette. She herself acknowledges that she did not at first believe in these rumours; but by and by, when she heard of a miraculous cure having been wrought in the town of Avignon itself, and having ascertained that this at least was no false report, she determined to have recourse to the same remedy in behalf of her dying sister. She expressly states in her deposition, that although she certainly desired the recovery of Sister St. Charles, yet that her principal object in this Novena was the glory of the Blessed Virgin, and the confirmation of the story she had heard of her apparition on the mountain of La Salette; and it was for this reason that she selected this particular sister from among others who were in the infirmary, because her illness was so notorious and so inveterate, that, should she be restored to health, this recovery would answer the end of the Novena far better than the recovery of any other. When the idea was first suggested to the invalid, she said that she had no wish to recover; and that she would rather die or continue to suffer as she now did, according to God's good pleasure. The superioress was obliged to interpose her authority in order to prevail upon her to take part in the Novena with the rest of the community; but when once the Novena was begun, the sufferer expressed her firm conviction that she should be cured.



Nothing, however, occurred during the first seven days to give any encouragement to such an expectation; on the contrary, she seemed to be daily growing worse and worse; so that the good sisters began to think their prayers were going to be answered in a different sense from what they had intended, and that the sufferings of their companion would be terminated by a removal to heaven, not by a restoration to this earth. There was to have been a general communion of all the sisters for the object of the Novena on the last day, the Saturday; but the unexpected arrival of the Bishop of Châlons caused them to anticipate this arrangement, and they went to holy Communion on the Friday. This was a great disappointment to Sister St. Charles; for she had hoped to have been cured in time to accompany her sisters to the altar; whereas she now found herself still stretched on her bed of sickness, in her habitual state of weakness and suffering, whilst all the rest of the community were assembled in the chapel. Whilst her mind was engaged with this thought, she felt a sudden and complete change throughout her whole body; all her ailments instantly left her; her own expression is, that "it was as though some invisible hand had lifted them all from off her;" she tried to turn in her bed, and found that she could do so with ease; whereupon she immediately exclaimed, "I am healed!" Another sister, who was lying ill in the same dormitory, misunderstood the words, and fancied she was dying; and being unable to go to her assistance, began to cry; whereupon Sister St. Charles jumped out of bed, and went to console her. Another sister, who had the care of the whole house while the community were at Mass, came running to the infirmary in a great state of alarm at hearing noises, as of people moving, in a room where she had left but two bed-ridden nuns; she arrives, well-nigh out of breath, and seeing one of these dying invalids sitting by the bedside of the other, she is seized with a sudden faintness. Sister St. Charles gives her water to drink, and becomes for the moment nurse to her two companions. Then she dresses herself without any assistance from any body, and goes to the ante-chapel, where she kneels without any support during the remainder of Mass. We need not describe the scene which followed; the amazement of the sisterhood, the doctors, and the public, who thronged the convent parlour for several days that they might see and converse with the nun whom they had known to have been so long at the point of death, and whom they now saw apparently in perfect health, and whom they listened to talking continually without fatigue. The medical man who attended her testifies both to the sud-

denness and completeness of her recovery; he says that he found her pulse, which but two or three days before had been at 150, reduced to 100; her voice clear and sound; her face healthy and joyous; her appetite and her strength returned, so that she could run up and down stairs with ease, and even carry a burden of 150 pounds weight without fatigue. And he concludes his account of her state with this observation, that if he is asked *how* this great change has taken place, he can only say, speaking as a doctor, that "it has not followed the ordinary phases; for myself, I must frankly acknowledge that I have never seen any thing at all like it." Another physician, the *médecin en chef* of the public hospital of the town, and a practitioner of thirty-six years' standing, speaks still more strongly: "I declare," he says, "that the unlooked-for recovery from a state judged by medical men to be mortal to a state of perfect health *sous tous les rapports fonctionnels et organiques*, which I have witnessed in the above-named Sister St. Charles, has been wrought suddenly and without the intervention of the ordinary processes of art, *et que partant il tient du prodige*." We are not surprised, then, to hear that the Archbishop of the diocese, who had known her during her long and painful illness, and who saw her now that she was thus suddenly restored to health, used constantly to declare that not even a resurrection from the dead would be to him a more patent miracle than the recovery of this person.

We will not detain our readers by any further details on the subject of miracles; we will only say that there have been very many both in various dioceses of France and elsewhere, some of which are supported by evidence not less clear and striking than that which we have recorded; and several, after having been juridically examined by the proper ecclesiastical authorities, with all that cautious prudence and strict observance of technical formalities which is so marked a characteristic of these episcopal investigations, have been solemnly approved and published; and when we consider the express object with which some of the devotional exercises that have been thus rewarded were originally begun, we do not hesitate to say, with Richard of St. Victor, *Domine, si error est quem credimus, a te decepti sumus*.

Only one subject now remains on which we are anxious to say a few words; and that is, the end and purpose of the apparition, its consequences both present and to come. Upon this, as upon every other branch of our inquiry, the writer, so often referred to in the *Times*, has long since expressed a very definite opinion. We must beg our readers to forgive us for

quoting it in his own language; but it is as follows: "The Virgin wants money;" "the whole wretched imposture is a mere scheme for obtaining money." It is not very clearly explained whether this money is to go to the children or to the clergy, nor how it is to be got; but no matter. *Iipse dixit*; and the English world believes. We are more powerfully affected by the bare assertion of what is in harmony with our prejudices, than by the most convincing proofs of what we would fain disbelieve. Nevertheless, as the *Times* is no oracle to us, we take the liberty of examining this statement more closely. As far as the children are concerned, we have seen what has become of them: one has devoted herself to a hard and active life of teaching the children of the poor and visiting the sick; the other is being brought up in an ecclesiastical seminary, with the distant hope of one day becoming a priest; but neither of them individually, nor the families of either of them, have derived any other temporal benefit whatever from the apparition; they themselves are at this moment poor and penniless, living upon the charity of others, and their families are precisely as they were before. And yet, as we have seen, it has not been for want of opportunity that they have remained in this destitute condition; they might have gained money, if they chose; we can only conclude, therefore, that they had no such desire. But the children, it will be said, are not the real culprits in the matter; they are only the tools of the crafty and covetous clergy, who will get the lion's share of the booty, as they had also the principal hand in plotting for it. But certainly, if this were the object with which the story was invented, we think it must be acknowledged that in this instance the clergy have outwitted themselves; for it would be hard to lay one's finger on a single ecclesiastic in the diocese and to say, This man will make money by the transaction; nor do we very clearly see how it could have been expected that any, in the present generation at least, should be able to reap such solid fruits from the imposture. It must have been foreseen—the whole history of the Church abounds with examples—that the first thing that would be done, if the story succeeded in gaining universal credit, would be to build a new church, and a house for the priests who should be attached to this church, and another house for the pilgrims who should come to visit it; and that all this building on the top of a very high mountain would require an amount of contributions, such as a single generation would scarcely perhaps supply. If it had been pretended that the masons and carpenters of the neighbourhood had conspired together to invent the story, we could have understood their motive, though we might have

misdoubted their ability. But an interested motive on the part of the clergy cannot so readily be understood, and has certainly not been realised in the result, excepting only in that more general way which the *Times* asserts is an abundantly adequate motive, viz. a desire "to add strength to the faith of their followers." This result has no doubt been obtained; and therefore, whenever the *Times*, or any other authority, can succeed in shewing us either that this or that priest *really did*, or even how this or that priest *possibly might* have produced all the phenomena which we have recorded, we will at once acknowledge that this may have been the motive of the imposture. But meanwhile, and as long as the only presumption of guilt that can be urged against the clergy is this, that *if* they did it, we can make a good guess as to the reason *why* they did it, it is clearly premature to put them upon their defence, and to call upon them to prove themselves to be innocent. Just as it would not be tolerated in an English court of justice that a man should be arraigned for murder merely because he happens to be the heir-at-law of some other man who is suddenly deceased, so the tribunal of right reason and sober judgment will not allow a charge of fraud to be brought against a whole body of men, merely because something extraordinary has happened whose results may not improbably turn to their advantage. Still less can this single presumption be allowed to take the place of evidence, and to authorise us in pronouncing that body of men to be really guilty; before such a verdict can be justly given, it must be shewn, not only that the fact insisted upon is very consistent with the idea of their guilt, but also that it is inconsistent with any other hypothesis.

But while we must refuse to admit the *à priori* conjectures of the *Times* as proofs of fraud on the part of the clergy, or even as affording reasonable grounds for suspecting the existence of any fraud in any one, we are able, on the other hand, to point to certain results and consequences which, as a matter of fact, really *have* followed from the apparition, and which seem to us at once to supply an adequate motive, and to attest in the most unequivocal manner its divine origin. We allude to the wonderful effect which it has produced upon the moral and religious character of the people. It is acknowledged on all hands that, six years ago, the state of religion in that part of France was most deplorable; a very considerable proportion of the inhabitants were living in such neglect of the Sacraments that they were out of the pale of the Church; not only were those commandments of God and of His Church habitually disregarded, which forbade swearing and enjoined



the sanctification of the Lord's day and the observance of days of fasting and abstinence, but those sins brought others also in their train; and the great majority of the people were living "without God in the world."\* But now the face of things is entirely changed; the voice of the blasphemer is silenced; the Sunday is not profaned by labour; the churches are frequented, religious duties faithfully attended to, and the Sacraments approached with reverence. So universal is this change, that we are assured that out of the six thousand inhabitants of the canton of Corps, there are scarcely one hundred whose lives are not now ordered, outwardly at least, according to a Christian model; and of many, the devotion and piety are most edifying. To what then, and to whom, shall we attribute this blessed result? "The tree is known by the fruit." "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"† Is the conversion of souls the work of man, or of God? and if of God, can we suppose that He vouchsafes to work miracles of His grace in the conversion of a whole neighbourhood, as a reward of human deceit and covetousness? Such an idea cannot be entertained for a moment; it remains then, that the apparition on the summit of La Salette can only have been a message of mercy from on high. God was its author; and He has blest it for the purpose for which it was sent, and the whole work has been His. Take this as a clue to the narrative, and every part of it becomes at once plain, consistent, and intelligible; but attempt to explain it by any other means, and you find yourself entangled in a labyrinth of difficulties. Even though it were possible, which we do not believe that it is, to account for all the other features in the history; to accuse the clergy of having invented it, and to assign a plausible motive for the invention; to represent the children by whom it has been propagated as prodigies of intellectual acuteness, though they have had the cunning to conceal it in every other transaction of their lives, both before and since; and to attribute the wonderful cures which have been wrought to the force of fancy and an excited imagination;—even though it were possible, we say, to do violence to our common sense, and to believe all this, yet one thing at least must always remain an inexplicable problem: How did the wickedness of the clergy work the spiritual amendment of the people?

\* Eph. ii. 12.

† St. Matt. xii. 33; vii. 16.

## APPENDIX.

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*Mandement of the Bishop of Grenoble, dated September 19th, 1851.*

(Referred to in p. 29.)

DEARLY BELOVED,—It is now five years since an event, so extraordinary as to have appeared at first incredible, was announced to us as having happened on one of the mountains in our diocese. This occurrence was nothing less than an apparition of the Blessed Virgin, reported to have been seen by two shepherds on the 19th September, 1846. She is supposed to have spoken to them of the misfortunes which threatened *her people*, especially on account of the blasphemies and profanation of the Sunday. She confided to each separately a secret, forbidding them to communicate it to any one. In spite of the natural simplicity of the two shepherds, in spite of the impossibility of any scheming between these ignorant children who were hardly acquainted with one another, in spite of the firmness and consistency of their evidence, which never varied, either before the magistrates or before thousands of persons, who exhausted every means to make them contradict themselves, or to extort from them the revelation of their secret, we were bound to be very slow in admitting as incontestable an event apparently so wonderful. Our precipitancy in the matter would not only have been contrary to the prudence recommended by the great Apostle to a Bishop, but it would have strengthened the prejudices of the enemies of our Faith, and of so many who are only Catholics by name. Thus, whilst numbers of pious souls received this fact with the greatest avidity, we carefully sought every possible motive to induce us to reject the story, if it could not be admitted with the greatest evidence of truth. We have, therefore, until now, braved the censure of those who, although otherwise well intentioned, we knew accused us of indifference, or even incredulity, on the subject.

We knew that the religion of Jesus Christ had no need of this particular event to establish the truth of a thousand celestial apparitions, which no one can reject without being guilty of impiety and blasphemy against both the Old and New Testament. "It is true our silence was not the effect of a foolish fear, which the declamations of certain minds might have inspired, resounding as they did through France in reference to this fact, as well as to many others affecting religion. Our silence was rather the result of following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which teaches, "Qui credit cito, levis corde est" (Eccl. xix. 4). It was our duty, therefore, to observe the most rigid circumspection, more especially in consequence of our position as Chief Pastor. On the other hand, we were strictly under obligation not to regard as impossible (and who will dare deny it?) an event which Almighty God might indeed well permit for His own glory; for His arm is not shortened, and His

power is the same to-day as in ages past. We have also often meditated at the foot of the altar upon those words which the great Apostle addressed to a holy Bishop, on whom he had laid his hands, "*Si non credimus, ille fidelis permanet; negare seipsum non potest*" (Tim. ii. 13; *ibid.* v. 14 and 15). Whilst it was our episcopal duty to defer, to reflect, and to implore with fervour the light of the Holy Spirit, the number of astounding facts published on all sides continually increased. Extraordinary cures were announced as occurring in divers parts of France, as well as in countries far distant. Invalids despaired of by physicians, or pronounced incurable, were said to be restored to perfect health, after invoking our Lady of La Salette, and in faith making use of the water of the fountain near to which the Queen of Heaven was supposed to have appeared to the two shepherds. From the first we had been told of this fountain,—we had been assured that it used to be intermittent, and never flowed except on the melting of the snow, or after very abundant rains. It was dry on the 19th Sept.; on the following day it began to flow, and has continued to do so without intermission. Marvellous water! if not in its origin, at least in its effects. Numerous accounts, both of the event at La Salette, as well as of the marvellous cures which followed it, daily reached us, both from places in the neighbourhood, and from various dioceses, some in manuscript, others in print. The author of one of these narratives was one of our venerable colleagues, who travelled from the shores of the ocean to this mountain, and conversed with the two young shepherds, like a father with his children, for nearly a whole day. Another fact which has appeared to us marvellous, is the incredible concourse of persons who, beyond all doubt, have assembled at different periods on the mountain, but especially on the anniversary of the apparition; and this is still more astonishing when one considers the distances travelled, and the other difficulties which such a pilgrimage offers. Some months after the event, we had already consulted our Chapter and the professors of our Ecclesiastical College (*Grand Séminaire*); but after all the facts above mentioned, and many others which it would be too long to enumerate, we judged it fitting to organise a numerous commission, composed of men, grave, pious, and learned, who might maturely examine and discuss the fact of the apparition and its results. The sittings of this commission were held in our presence. The two shepherds, who said they were favoured with the visit of the Heavenly Messenger, were interrogated separately and simultaneously, their answers were weighed and discussed; all the objections which could be opposed to the facts related were freely offered. One of our vicars-general, who had been charged by us to collect all the facts, was equally required to give an account of the sittings of the commission, and to state the answers to the objections; this conscientious and impartial labour, intitled, "*The truth of the event of La Salette*," which has been printed, and has received our approbation, shows to what an extent the examination has been carried, and how great attention has been bestowed on it. Although our conviction was already complete, and without a shadow of doubt, at the end of the session of the commission, which terminated 13th December, 1847, we were unwilling to pronounce a doctrinal judgment on a fact of so great importance. However, the work of M. l'Abbé Rousselot very soon received the approbation of many Bishops, and a vast number of men eminent for learning and piety. We know that this book was translated into all European languages; many new works appeared at the same time, and in different countries, upon this fact, published by men of consideration, who had come to La Salette

expressly to ascertain upon the spot the truth of the matter. Pilgrimages did not diminish; persons of gravity, vicars-general, professors of theology, priests and distinguished laics, came from many hundred leagues to offer to the Virgin, powerful and full of goodness, their pious sentiments of love and gratitude for the cures and other benefits which they had received through her. These prodigies did not cease to be attributed to the invocation of our Lady of La Salette, and we know that many of them are considered to be truly miraculous by the Bishops of the dioceses in which they happened. All this is stated in a second volume published by M. l'Abbé Rousselot in 1850, which has for its title, *New Documents upon the Event of La Salette*. The author might have added that illustrious prelates of the Church preached upon the apparition of the Holy Virgin; that in many places, and at least with the tacit assent of our venerable colleagues, many pious persons had constructed chapels, already well frequented, dedicated to "our Lady of La Salette," or had placed statues in the parish churches to her honour. Lastly, numerous demands were addressed to us, to authorise the erection of a sanctuary which might perpetuate the remembrance of this great event. It is well known that we have not been without opponents; what moral truth, what human fact, or even divine fact, has not experienced opposition? But to alter our belief in an event so extraordinary, so inexplicable without divine interposition, of which all the circumstances and consequences unite to shew the finger of God, there would need some contrary fact equally extraordinary, equally inexplicable with that of La Salette, or at least some fact which might explain that of La Salette in a natural manner. Now, we have never yet met with such an explanation, and we therefore boldly proclaim our conviction of the truth of the history. We have redoubled our prayers, imploring the Holy Spirit to assist us, and to communicate to us his divine light. We have equally claimed with all confidence the protection of the immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, considering it to be one of our most sweet and sacred duties to omit nothing which may contribute to increase the devotion of the faithful towards her, and to testify to her our own gratitude for the special favour vouchsafed to our diocese. We have moreover never ceased scrupulously to confine ourselves within the holy rules which the Church has laid down in the writings of her wise doctors; and upon this subject, as upon all others, even to reconsider our judgment, if the Chair of the Holy Peter, the mother and mistress of all churches, believed it right to publish a judgment contrary to ours. Such were the dispositions, and such were the sentiments with which we were animated, when divine Providence provided the occasion of enjoining on the two privileged children the duty of communicating their secrets to our holy Father Pius IX. To the name of the Vicar of Jesus Christ the shepherds understood that they ought to be obedient; they decided to reveal to the Sovereign Pontiff a secret which, until then, they had kept with an invincible constancy, and which nothing had been able to extract from them. The secret was then written by each separately; they afterwards folded and sealed their letters in presence of trustworthy men whom we had appointed as witnesses. We have charged two priests, who enjoy our entire confidence, to carry to Rome this mysterious despatch. Thus is removed the last objection that was made against the apparition, that there was no secret, or that the secret was of no importance, or puerile, and that the children would not make it known to the Church.

Wherefore, &c.



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